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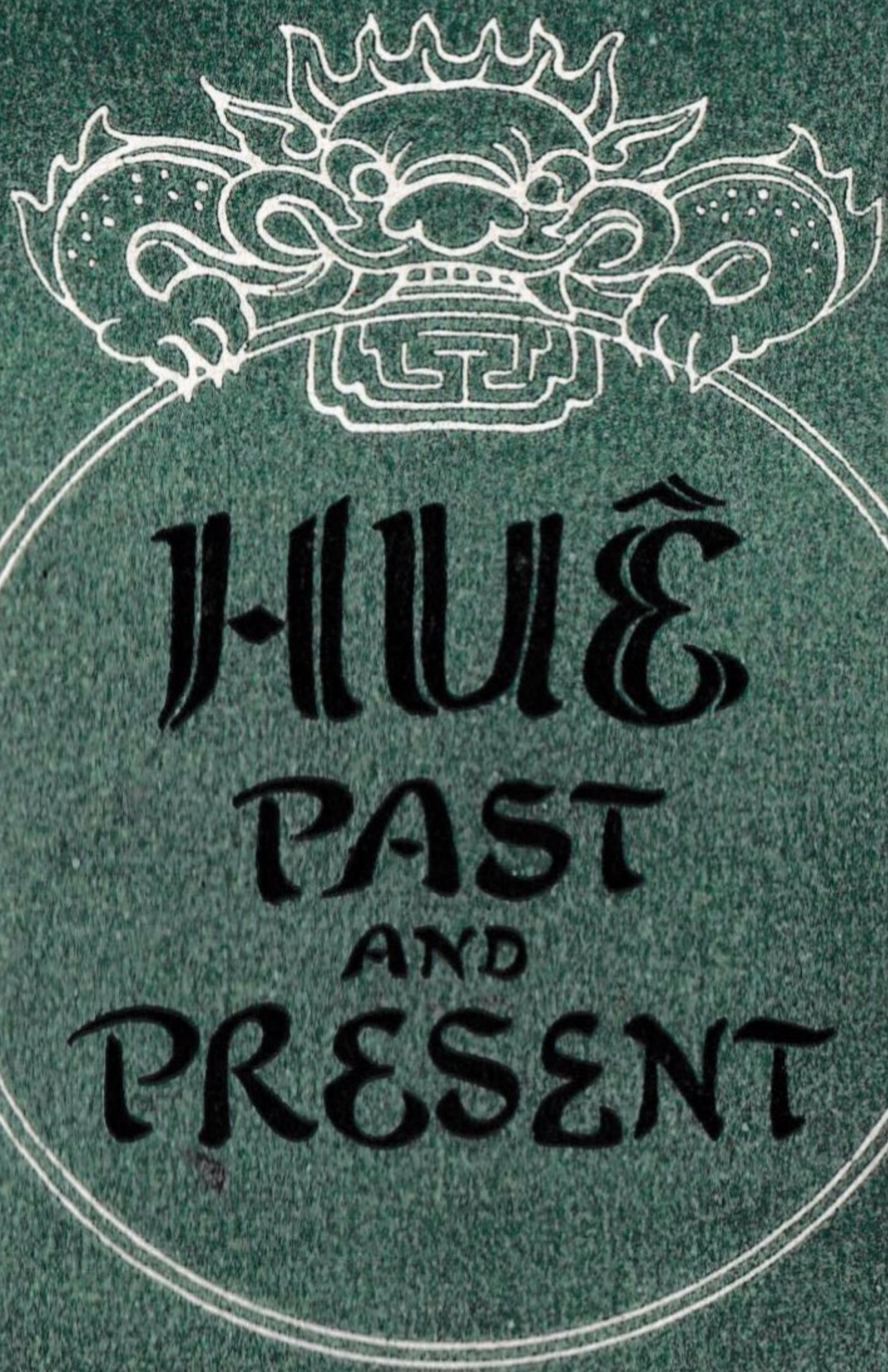
Vietnamese Studies



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HUE, PAST AND PRESENT

Hue has always fascinated tourists by its enchanting situation beside the Perfume River, the antique charm of its royal tombs, the grace of its young girls and the delicacies of its cooking.

It was first incorporated into Viet Nam six hundred years ago after the marriage of a Tran princess to the king of Champa and, for one century and a half from 1802 to 1945 *it was chosen as capital of the kingdom.*

With the rebellion of the builders of the necropolis, the attack on the French garrison at Mang Ca, and the activities of the resistant scholars, Hue has been the seat of many popular and patriotic movements as well as of bloody repressions in the 19*th and the early* 20*th century.*

The thirties, forties and fifties of this century witnessed the political effervescence of the period of the Indochinese Democratic Front, the August 1945 *insurrection which sealed the fate of a backward monarchy, and the brilliant exploits of the first war of resistance.*

In the present confrontation between the Vietnamese people and US imperialism, Hue has occupied the forefront

of the international stage with the struggle of the students, intellectuals, Buddhists and working people and the unforgettable epic of the Tet of the year Mau Than (1968).

Poetry and action, battlefield between the forces of progress and those of reaction, Hue in the past as in the present has shown very different and sometimes contradictory faces. These we will endeavour to bring out in this issue.

V.S.

Hue — City of Beauty, City of Glory

NGUYEN KHAC VIEN

For four weeks, on the great flag-tower which dominates with all its height the ancient imperial city of Hue, the NFL banner has been flapping proudly in the wind. For Johnson and Westmoreland, this "rebel" flag over the imperial palaces has become a nightmare, for it brings out in full relief the shameful failure that the Americans have just suffered in Viet Nam. Ten, twenty, fifty times, US Marines, South Korean mercenaries, puppet troops have been hurled against the imperial city; ten, twenty, fifty times, they have been beaten back with bloody losses. The US Command has ordered the bombardment of the city and the citadel by its air force and Seventh Fleet guns, and the use of napalm, phosphorus bombs, toxic gases against populous areas, but Hue still holds out and its streets are littered with bodies of dead Marines and smoking carcasses of tanks. The patriotic forces hold the city and the citadel, fiercely attack enemy positions on nearby hills and reinforcement columns, sink river craft sent to the rescue of decimated enemy

units. US battalions boasting of an advance of a few dozen yards or of the conquest of a residential block, only to be vigorously repelled; US soldiers noisily praising themselves for having succeeded in hoisting the Stars and Stripes on a... broken chair: that's the point to which have been reduced the Marines, those reputedly invincible warriors, after four weeks of bitter fighting. To bomb and napalm a city with no military target but dotted with invaluable historical monuments, a city which the Americans claim they have come to "protect" and "liberate" — to what depth of barbarity and impotence the US Command has sunk! A *Reuter* correspondent on Feb., 8 described how a Marine noncom was plundering elephant tusks from a half-destroyed house. A fine image indeed of the knights of the "free world"!

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* *

For four weeks, Hue has been haunting the nights of Johnson and Westmoreland with the spectre of defeat. For four weeks, the red-and-blue flag with a gold star, fluttering in the wind above the imperial palaces, has not ceased singing in all Vietnamese hearts the song of victory, heroism, and reconquered freedom. How lovingly the entire nation has been following the fight waged in each street, in each house, by veteran combatants and by youngsters who as soon as the insurrection broke out have joined the patriotic armed forces by the thousand, by old mothers serving tea and rice in the combat trenches, by pedicab drivers and sampan-women

carrying food and ammunition and bearing stretchers under bombs and shells! With what joy the entire people greet the liberation of thousands of detainees from the jails, and that of villages, wards, and streets from the grip of torturers, gendarmes and traitors! With what delight everyone hails the birth of new revolutionary forces and organizations, the Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace Forces and the People's Revolutionary Committee! Hue, the marching wing of an entire people, the cynosure of the whole world, has entered history, taking place among those heroic cities which have become the pride of the nations, for having opposed to brutal arms the invincible love of freedom.

*
* *

We had loved her, of all cities. Amidst a rolling hilly expanse, the Perfume River unfolds its glittering stream. The scholar who came to compete in mandarin examinations was reluctant to leave Hue, charmed by the grace of her young girls in flowing gowns. The traveller felt himself attached to her, enchanted by the beauty of her palaces and gardens, and the refinements of her cuisine and speech. When in the evening, from the sampans gliding on the river rose the song of boatmen, one was irresistibly captivated by this city of beauty, which had neither factories nor trading centres, but exuded through all her pores an indefinable pleasant way of living.

We had loved Hue, but our love was not without some bitterness, for the emperors who reigned there

had betrayed the country. The poet To Huu in his youth hated her "ancient walls, cold and frozen," and the "brocade gowns and velvet boots" of the traitorous courtiers. We impatiently waited for the day when, rid of foreign occupiers, kings and mandarins, Hue and her beauty would be returned to the people. The Hue people rose up in 1945 and swept the rulers away. Afterwards, to the French then American occupiers, the people of Hue, so refined and gentle that one would hardly believe them capable of any action, put up a tenacious and indomitable resistance. For years, Ngo Dinh Can, Diem's brother, with the support of Americans arms, had thousands of patriots tortured and summarily executed. But Hue remained unyielding. It was from Hue that started in 1963 the wave of urban protests which overthrew the Diem regime; it was in Hue that one found the most vigorous opposition to the Thieu-Ky clique.

*
* *

At present, our love for you, Hue, city of beauty, city of glory, is no longer mixed. The barbarians have destroyed your palaces and gardens, but under your ruins the Yankee aggressor is buried for ever, and the victorious people will rebuild you in even more beautiful shape. You will rise again, more fascinating than ever, while Johnson, Westmoreland and their gang will carry on their faces the stigmas of defeat and ignominy.

March 1968

Hue, a Certain Art of Living

LE VAN HAO

A native of Hue, Professor Le Van Hao taught there from 1965 to 1968 when he joined the Resistance and became President of the Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace Forces of the Hue - Thua Thien region and later President of the Revolutionary People's Committee of that region. The following are extracts from his "An Ethnologist's Notebook".

Autumn 1965.

Here I was, back in Hue after twelve years of absence. Coming back to this pretty little town, which to me was like a childhood friend, I felt as though I was humming a poem, a tune, one that was very dear to my heart and had long been forgotten.

Not so long ago, when nostalgia of Hue was wringing my heart, I had tried to put it out of my mind by singing to myself Baudelaire's *Invitation to Travel* or *Evening Harmony*, by wandering in the streets of Bruges, Venice, Amsterdam, bathed in spring

mist or twilight glow, or summer or autumn moonlight. I also took long walks in the streets of Paris, which had become very familiar to me. But the rivers and canals of those cities, with their old bridges and their gondolas, only made me even more homesick.

But now here I was, back in the town of my childhood and adolescence, again relishing this symphony in blue created by man and nature. A feminine river, a string of villages along its banks, a clear sky over quiet fields dotted with white egrets — all this but a few steps from the town itself, and a bit further, a few minutes' ride on a bicycle, hills, pine groves, a river mouth, a sandy beach... Except for a few weeks of uninterrupted showers towards the end of the year and a period of sweltering heat in summer, the climate is relatively mild and days and nights are coloured by the most varied hues.

Against this background, man becomes naturally an artist. And it happens that he himself becomes a work of art, beautiful in his virtues, and elevated by his heroism. The beauty of ordinary people who create history.

Hue - Thua Thien : the name evokes in the first place the river, a river with a feminine name, Song Huong, the Perfume River, rich in colour, sound and perfume. Born in the Truong Son mountain range, it winds its way amidst vast stretches of forests where medicinal plants — *acorus gramineus, acorus calamus, osmunda wachelli* — smell sweet. The stream is an impetuous one down to the Thu waterfalls, the Dong Giang ferry, the confluence of Dinh Mon and Thach

Han. Then it calms down, meanders among pine groves, tangerine and grape-fruit orchards, mist-veiled temples and pagodas, the plumes of areca palms, lagoons, and finally empties itself in the sea at Thuan An — regretfully, it seems. This symphony in green and blue is adorned in its variations with splashes of vermilion, created by the flame-trees in summer, along the river banks. As if to offset this bright colour, the sampans display brown sails, the temples and walls are covered with moss, the colour of the past, and these discreet hues are set against the background of an azure sky, emerald rice plants, dark-green foliage, and then there is an allegretto in white : the white gowns and hats of the thousands of schoolgirls going to class.

As I leaned against the railing of the Trang Tien bridge and sauntered along the flame-tree and coconut-lined river banks, I realized that the native land had engraved in me ineffaceable marks, which no foreign influence, however attractive, could ever erase. I had been drawn to ethnology by a desire to rediscover the images and memories of my childhood and adolescence, when remembrance of the river merged with that of my mother, of a sister or a sweetheart. Someone has said that speaking of the river evokes in his mind a young girl of Hue washing her luxuriant hair in an infusion in which the fragrance of Huong Can tangerine and orange blossoms mixes with the discreet scent of *huong bai* roots.

To the colours and perfumes, to the cool breeze that ripples the surface of the river, to the kites and egrets gliding over the fields, one should add the music of guitars, lutes and flutes, which play during moonlit nights, accompanied at dusk by the bells from some pagoda and at dawn by the crowing of some sleepy 'cock. Besides the Song Huong, the province and town are watered by a whole network of rivers and canals. In the west towers the Truong Son, preceded by a series of less severe-looking foothills : Ngu Binh, Kim Phung, Thien Tho... Writes an enamoured poet :

It's a long, meandering way to Hue :
Blue hills, azure rivers, what a splendid view !
I love you, and will go with you wherever your steps take you...

But the American aggressors have come. What will remain of that beauty ? I shall never forget that late afternoon in 1965 when I was engrossed in the contemplation of a gorgeous sunset at Nguyet Bieu Long Tho. A sudden explosion, a bomb dropped somewhere in the direction of the Truong Son, brutally interrupted my dreams. And I shall never forget those young women on the river, who again fell prey to a cruel destiny which one had thought had vanished with the disappearance of the old colonial regime. With Yankee colonialism, things would be a great deal worse. The *Song of the Sampan-woman on the Perfume River* written by the poet To Huu more than thirty years ago, again came back to my mind :

The moon rises, and then wanes :
All my life I shall sail on my sampan.
My sampan is empty :
When shall I be able to leave this stream of depravation ?
How could one talk of love when all of it is hypocrisy and shame ?
My sampan has grown derelict :
Could it ever be young and fresh again ?

Saigon, Hue and all other cities and towns of South Viet Nam have become, under American occupation, immense brothels, in the words of Senator Fulbright. When will our profaned cities and women recover youth and freshness ?

*
* *

Music is an integral part of the Hue landscape, a daily presence like the air one breathes, a rhythmical accompaniment to man's life from the cradle to the grave. A man of Hue will never forget the songs that lulled him to sleep as a child :

Sleep, my child, sleep, love,
Mummy is going to get some betel.
Lime she'll buy at the market on the bridge,
Areca-nuts at Nam Pho and betel leaves at Zinh.

How could one forget those songs one was singing as a child when playing at "stroking the tiger's beard" without suspecting in the least that this and other games were in fact survivals of prehistorical

agrarian rites. Evelyne-Porée points this out in her book on "The Agrarian Rites of the Cambodians".

The ethnologist will get a plentiful harvest by collecting the songs that accompany the various trades in Hue, the *ho* songs which are so varied for they mark the rhythms of the most diverse activities: ladling water into the fields, weeding, husking paddy, winnowing rice, etc. After the harvest, men and women, by groups of four or six, pound rice in the moonlight and exchange alternate songs which may last all night.

A preamble may go like this:

Greetings to you from North and South,
Greetings to my equals and non-equals,
If I greet the men then the women will feel slighted,
So let me send you all a general greeting!

Then, a more direct question may be asked:

A plum blossom I am; let me ask the apricot flower:
Is there a path leading to the garden where you are?

Little by little, a pledge comes to be exchanged:

Close ties unite us, together
We shall live a hundred years.

Often a girl seeks to test the mind and heart of a boy:

Tell me, which things would you readily throw away?
And which would you keep as precious possessions?
Which thing would never take to itself wings?
And which would never be thrown to the winds?
Give me the right answers and I'll be yours.

Here come the answers:

Money, that's what I would readily throw away.
Humanity, justice, that's my most precious possessions.
My love for you will never take to itself wings,
And that for my parents will never be cast to the winds.
I've answered your questions: will you keep your pledge?

These singing tournaments are most often practised on the river between boatmen and women, during moonlit nights when their sampans are gliding on the waters. A song may be ethereal like the *ho mai nhi* or impetuous like the *ho mai day*. A young sampan-woman may sing alone, as if she were confiding her inner feelings to the starlit sky and the tranquil waters, or she may exchange repartees with someone in another sampan.

Sometimes, the song touches upon a topic of the day:

Each evening, at the Van Lau landing stage,
Who is there, an angling-rod in hand?
In his mind, hope alternates with anguish
While on the river, boats go to and fro.
Boatmen's songs rise, and his heart aches
As he thinks of our mountains and rivers.

This was a tribute to the patriot Tran Cao Van who was (late 19th century) plotting to drive the French colonialists out of Hue, then the country's capital. It was a discreet homage, full of delicate

feeling, typical of the people of Hue. It is through *noi ve*, ballads sung at market-places, landing-stages and entrances to bridges, that the minstrels contribute to the political education, so to speak, of the masses. Their story of the assault mounted on the Capital by the French troops comprises more than 3,000 lines, and during the First Resistance (1945-1954) many *ve* were sung in the villages in praise of the exploits of the patriotic forces. Songs follow man to his grave : the laments of widows and orphans are accompanied by songs in the course of funerals. It is worth observing that once the deceased has been interred, the songs take on a more serene, even gay, note, one that is more conducive to optimism.

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The 82 pagodas in the province (the oldest, Thien Mu, dates back to the 17th century) bear witness to rich architectural traditions. These also manifest themselves in many private dwellings with sturdy pillars of ironwood or jackwood decorated with artistic designs and built with the same art which had created so many temples, pagodas and palaces.

In front of each of those dwellings, one always finds an "artificial hill" (Japanese garden): in the midst of a small pond, rocks are piled, simulating hills and caves, and on those moss-covered stones, the artist puts bridges across streams, erects temples, positions a woodcutter or an angler, lays out gardens with dwarf trees : fig-trees, pine trees, willows, cactus, etc. Not only the size of those trees has been reduced but their shapes and bearing have been patiently moulded so as to be in harmony with the rest of the landscape or to symbolize ritual attitudes: a dancing phoenix, father and son, brother and sister...

The laying out of an "artificial hill", especially for the elderly, is an art of synthesis, in which the architect, landscapist, sculptor and decorator, all in one man, creates a universe in which nature, completely tamed, draws as close to man as possible.

The "artificial hill" is always an integral part of a carefully tended garden. Amidst jack, orange, longan, and custard-apple trees, planted in a studied disorder, space is reserved for flower-beds: roses, lilies, chrysanthemums... and for ponds in which lotus plants and gold-fish are raised while among the foliage are hung lanterns and a cage from which a talking blackbird sends out his greetings to the visitor. Often a path in the garden leads to a landing stage on the river. Man and nature are in perfect communion.

Hue as a whole is a vast garden. Architecture sets itself the task of getting the work of man in harmony with surrounding nature. No palace, temple or tower rises in the open in proud defiance of the natural frame. The aim of the artist is not to build any single monument, but to lay out a whole landscape in which the pagoda, palace or tomb nestles in the midst of hills, trees, and ponds, with the modesty and discreet beauty of a half-blown flower. In the midst of a forest, on the slope of a hill, the pagoda or temple softens the wilderness and solitude and marks the presence of man and his creative hand.

Land and water, mounts and rivers, man and nature, are in union and harmony within a universe whose parts are organically bound together: this conception has imbued the life of the Vietnamese people in the course of many centuries. (1)

The original beauty of the royal tombs cannot make us forget the sufferings imposed on the people when they were built. This folk-song on the tomb of King Tu Duc, entitled "Ten Thousand Years" is a good reminder:

Ten thousand years! Where are those ten thousand years?
Ramparts are strewn with soldiers' bones,
And moats filled with the people's blood.

While admiring the beauty of those monuments created by the artists and people of the past — as when we are standing before the ruins of Angkor or Borobudur — a man of our time cannot help having mixed feelings.

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The people wear simple clothes: the traditional gown and white trousers for the women. White is the usual colour for schoolgirls and brown for working people. Outlandish fashions, especially from the other side of the Pacific, with gaudy colours and provoking nudities, are not appreciated. Even for ceremonial occasions, discreet colours are preferred:

(1) The author successively describes the temple of Hon Chen, the Thien Mu pagoda, and the royal tombs. In this article, we cannot go into those details. *Ed.*

violet gowns were in vogue only during a short period, 1925-1945, when the urban petty-bourgeoisie cultivated a certain archaic romanticism. Young girls simply let their hair fall on their shoulders, while older women tie it into a bun: both use for their hair a very discreet scent of orange and grape-fruit blossoms.

The conical palm-leaf hat is very carefully made. The frame is made of thin rings of polished bamboo and the covering of very white palm leaves, almost transparent so as to permit reading of a short poem written on a piece of paper inserted between the two layers. That is the way the "poem-hat" of a young girl of Hue is made. It is kept steady by a ribbon of green, violet or orange silk, which sets off its simple beauty.

The people also eat very simply. Three dishes at most at each meal: a soup, vegetables, some fish or pork. In current use are pickled vegetables, easily digested, protein-rich vegetables such as soya-beans and peanuts, and *nuoc mam*, the traditional fish brine. Simplicity doesn't exclude delicacy: by using various ingredients, the housewife cooks dishes in which several flavours are happily combined. For instance, green vegetables may be associated with slices of carambole, fig, and green banana, and eaten with pork and fish sauce. A rich variety of spices is available: red pepper, black pepper, ginger, mint, etc. The presentation of the food on the plate as well as on the tray takes into account shapes and colours: the star shape of the carambole slices, the red of the pepper, the porcelain white of the soya sprouts...

Hue housewives can also make a whole series of pies and cakes, sweet or salt, some of national repute; a wide variety of soup, vermicelli, meat-pies, preserved fruit. The favourite drink is tea, often flavoured with jasmine, lotus, chrysanthemum or areca flowers and served in tiny cups, in the early morning or late evening. To drink tea in company with friends while waiting for a *quynh* flower to open at night is a particularly delicate pleasure.

The demeanour of the Hue people is, like their food and clothing, simple, modest, discreet, full of delicacy. Here several centuries of court life have imposed complicated rituals, but the people, who dislike this etiquette, always behave in a natural and candid way. Love for one's fellow-creatures, a sense of solidarity and gratitude, are common feelings. A popular saying runs like this:

Let us not forget the least act of kindness done by others,
Let us forgive all grievances we may have against them.

People abhor vulgarity, foul language, grandiloquent gestures, brutality. Their sentimental life, a very rich one, turns inward, and from the outside one sees only a calm, dignified attitude, often of limpid simplicity. They like to sing and to recite poetry. This inner beauty is reflected in the eyes and faces of the women, frail and delicate but ready to endure the greatest sacrifices and face the hardest trials for the happiness of their husbands and children. *Thuy chung*, faithfulness "to the very end," is a highly valued virtue. Husbands and friends are not deserted in misfortune.

Those men and women, who are very simple people but are capable of deep love, have shown themselves to be highly courageous, heroic when facing tyranny or foreign aggression. This had been driven home to the mandarins and kings, and the French colonialists in their times saw the people of Hue rise up against them repeatedly. Ngo Dinh Can, Ngo Dinh Diem's brother, the "satrap of Hue", failed to lord it over the people of Hue in spite of bloody repression. For the Americans and their stooges, Hue has remained one of the most difficult cities to rule. Resistance comes not only from the toiling masses and from the young. It has been joined by the bonze superior of the most ancient pagoda in the city, a great lady of the Court, and college professors richly paid by the Americans. In 1945, the flag of the revolution was hoisted over the main gate of the Imperial Palace; in 1963, and again in 1966, the people held tempestuous demonstrations; in 1968 the great popular offensive swept away the US-puppet administration. Under a deluge of American bombs and in face of the bayonets of puppet troops, the people of Hue kept singing:

The moon may wax and wane,
The river may be deep in one place and shallow in another.
But if you ever go north, please tell Uncle Ho,
Our feelings will never change, like the round shape of our women's poem-hats!

Old Hue

(From its origins to 1945)

HONG THUY AND H.N.

General Features

The area of Hue was united to Viet Nam, then called the Kingdom of Dai Viet, more than six centuries ago (1). In 1306, King Tran Anh Tong married his sister, Princess Huyen Tran, to the king of Champa Che Man, in exchange for the two districts of O and Ly which afterwards were renamed Thuan and Hoa. In the fifteenth century these lands consisting of the present-day provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien (2) and part of Quang Nam province

(1) The area of Hue had been occupied by the Chinese feudalists (Tsin) in the 3rd century B.C. Under the Han (111 B.C.) it was part of the district of Jenan (*quan Nhat Nam* in Vietnamese) bounded in the North by the Gianh River and Hoanh Son mountain and to the South by the Thu Bon River. Before it became Vietnamese the country had been conquered by the Lin Yi (Lam Ap) or Champa who had given it a Hindu-Cham culture. By 111 B.C. the Chinese had made the Hue region the capital of Nhat Nam, known under the name of Tay Quyen (Si Kiuan). This became a fortified Cham centre but was sacked many times by the Chinese forces in the 5th and the 7th centuries.

(2) Hue is the capital of Thua Thien province.

were merged by the Le kings into a single administrative unit called Thuan Hoa.

During the long period of the separation between the North and the South, which lasted for more than two centuries, the new Southern region remained a prized possession of the Nguyen lords. After some moving around, the capital was established at Phu Xuan village. This was the embryo of the future town of Hue which was at first called Phu Xuan.

It was at Phu Xuan that Nguyen Hue, the famous leader of the Tay Son peasant uprising, ascended the throne after his reunification of the country. In 1788, he launched a victorious expedition against the Manchu invaders who had occupied Thang Long (Hanoi).

After Nguyen Hue's premature death, Nguyen Anh used foreign aid, especially that of France, in order to reoccupy Phu Xuan in 1801. He established himself there and made it the capital of the Nguyen dynasty in 1802. What was the reason for this choice? King Thieu Tri (1841-1847) suggested that the cause was related to both strategy and geomancy:

"*The capital, Phu Xuan, is situated in a picturesque site among mountains and rivers: its position recalls the Chu dynasty's Lac Ap and the Han's Quan Trung. It is more solid and better protected by natural defences than any other place, and possesses the strongest gate ever known in the world. With its long citadel on the north side, the Hoanh Son mountain, Linh Giang river, Binh Son mountain and Huong Thuy river, it is endowed*

with a splendour which will last for thousands of centuries. It dominates its surroundings, it stands at the centre, and homage is paid to it from the four corners of the world. As it is surrounded by mountains and rivers, ten men may hold back a hundred and face the world. (Dai Nam Thuc Luc Chinh Bien) vol. XXI — *Nha xuat ban khoa hoc xa hoi*, Hanoi, pages 72-75).

Another reason, not admitted openly, seems to have inspired the Nguyen kings in their preference for Phu Xuan instead of Thang Long (Hanoi) as the kingdom's capital: the latter city, an old city of Bac Ha (North) would, on account of its glorious past, its eight centuries of national independence, have been too evocative a symbol for the inhabitants of the North who were still greatly attached to the legitimate dynasty of the Le.

Phu Xuan (or Thuan Hoa) stopped being used as the name of the capital after the conquest of Viet Nam by the French in the second half of the 19th century. The new name, Hue, was probably a deformation of Hoa in Thuan Hoa. As early as the 17th century, Hue had been mentioned by European travellers under the name of Seuna, Sinea or Singea, various pronunciations for Thuan Hoa.

Twelve kilometres distant from the sea, lying between the 16th and the 17th parallels (northern latitude) and the 106th and 108th meridians, Hue is situated in Thua Thien and has always been the capital of that province.

With Quang Tri, South Viet Nam's northernmost province, crossed by the 17th parallel, Thua Thien

forms a geographical entity often called Tri-Thien for short. A narrow strip of land not more than 80 kilometres in width and 150 kilometres in length squeezed between the mountains and the sea, it comprises three regions stretching from west to east: the high massifs covered by virgin jungle of the Truong Son range along the frontier with Laos; a middle region of hills in tiers and forests interspersed with valleys and plateaux; and a narrow coastal plain.

The plain of Thua Thien is very fragmented, being broken up by many large sand hills. There is only a narrow ribbon of plain less than one kilometre in breadth running for tens of kilometres along the sea coast. The rice-fields in the Hue area and the six neighbouring districts (1) are rather fertile and produce a highly praised type of rice called the "An Cuu rice". The local orchards are famous for their delicious fruit: thin-skinned tangerines from Huong Can, sweet oranges from My Loi, longanes from Phung Tien, grapefruit from Nguyet Bieu, lotus seeds from Tinh Tam Lake.

Thua Thien is irrigated by a rich network of waterways including the Bo River, O Lau River, Pho Trach River, Truoi River and the famous Perfume River (Song Huong or Huong Giang) which encloses Hue in a setting of dream and poetry. Below the town the

(1) The province of Thua Thien, with 410,000 inhabitants, contains 600 villages distributed over 9 districts: Phong Dien, Quang Dien, Huong Tra, Huong Thuy, Nam Hoa, Phu Vang, Phu Thu, Vinh Loc, Phu Loc.

Perfume River joins the Tam Giang, an arm of the sea connecting the other waterways of Thua Thien into a network which links the capital with all parts of the province. The Tam Giang River and lagoons such as Cau Hai, An Tuyen, Sam, etc., provide the local population with an inexhautible reserve of excellent fish and shellfish.

Thua Thien is also girdled by picturesque mountains and hills: Kim Ngoc, Tam Thai, Thien Tho, Kim Phung, Truoi, Bach Ma (a mountain resort 40 km south of Hue) Ngu Binh. The Ngu Binh (Royal Screen) height, 4 km southwest of Hue is an ideal spot for the townspeople to go for walks. It was thought to be a magic rampart shielding the Royal Palace from the mysterious influences coming from the South.

Besides its natural beauty spots, Hue is better known to tourists for its architectural interest. Its citadel, begun in 1805, took twenty years to build (1).

"*Every day, from* 50,000 *to* 80,000 *inhabitants were mobilized for the work and corvée. The province of Nghe An was ordered to supply iron-wood, the province of*

(1) "Hue's fortified enceinte, built after the Vauban system under the direction of French specialists, looks from the outside like a European military town, except for its broad gates topped by Chinese pavilions, and these expel all illusions from the foreigners as soon as they come nearer. This enceinte is about 6km in circumference and is made up of high brick walls with ditches, a glacis and bastions. The citadel has ten entrances where it is possible to cross over the ditches on big blocks of stone." Michel Duc Chaigneau (1803—1894) *Souvenirs de Hué*.

Thanh Hoa stones for paving, and the province of Quang Nam bricks and tiles." (*Lich Su Viet Nam*, vol. I, page 274, *Nha xuat ban khoa hoc xa hoi*, Hanoi, 1971) King Gia Long ordered many of the buildings of old Thang Long to be dismantled so as to use their building materials.

Phu Xuan citadel (Hue) is in the form of a square with 2.5 km-long sides. It is encircled by a deep moat and a brick wall 8 metres high and 20 metres thick, with ten 16-metre-high gates for entrance: the An Hoa Gate, the Chanh Tay Gate, (the main gate on the western side) the Right Gate, the Quang Duc Gate, the Thuong Tu Gate, the Dong Ba Gate, etc. The last two are the most frequently used. Inside this citadel the capital town (*Kinh Thanh*) shelters the Royal Town (*Hoang Thanh*) and the Forbidden Purple City (*Tu Cam Thanh*).

The Royal Town (Hoang Thanh) is a square enclosed by a ditch and a second wall 600 metres long with four gates : Ngo Mon (Southern Gate) Hoa Binh, Hien Nhan, Chuong Duc. The flag-tower stands in the south in front of the Ngo Mon gate. The latter was only opened on ceremonial days, when the monarch received homage from his mandarins.

Besides the Forbidden Purple City, the Royal Town contains palaces, temples and gardens. The Thai Hoa (Perfect Concord) Palace with red and golden columns and built on 2-metre-high foundations was the throne room where the king used to hold state audiences. The monarch would take his promenade or rest

in the Truong Sanh Palace and read or listen to commentaries on books in the Kham Van Palace, in the Co Ha Garden. Temples such as the Thai Mieu (Temple of the Generations) and The Mieu (Temple of the Ancestors) were dedicated to Gia Long's ancestors.

The Forbidden Purple City (*Tu Cam Thanh*) was reserved for the royal family and protected by a wall one metre thick and 4 metres high, with seven gates, each reserved for a special purpose.

The king would receive his mandarins and do his daily work in the Can Chanh (Heaven's Laws) Palace which was sumptuously adorned with lacquer work and gold. He had his personal dwelling (Can Thanh Palace, later called Kien Trung Palace), his own theatre (Duyet Thi Duong), his kitchen (Thuong Thien), his rest house (Vien Duong Tam), his health service (Vien Thai Y) and his Guard Office (Thi Ve Truc Phong). Five other palaces accommodated his wives and concubines.

Within the precinct of the Royal Town, there was also the Tinh Tam Lake adorned with lotus flowers situated in front of the Archive Pavilion (Tang Tho) where the Court's documents were kept.

The Nam Giao Hill (Heaven's Altar) was built outside the town. It consists of three superimposed enceintes whose different levels are approached by four staircases facing the four cardinal points. The upper tier is round like the Sky, the middle tier is square like the earth and so too is the lower one. Every three years, the cult of the sky and the earth was

celebrated by the king. The ritual ceremonies used to be held in a very luxurious and costly manner. From two to five thousand mandarins and soldiers were mobilized to walk in a procession composed of three trains.

Near the Nam Giao Hill, was the Tigers' Arena (Hô Quyên) for fights between tigers and elephants. It consisted of a palace where the king would go to watch the spectacle, three cages for tigers and two cages for elephants.

The numerous temples and pagodas (Thien Mu or Heavenly Lady Pagoda, Dieu De Pagoda, Bao Quoc Pagoda, the Temple of Literature, Ngoc Tran or Jade Cup Temple), and specially the royal tombs five or ten kilometres distant from the town bestow on Hue an old-style charm and an air of exoticism (1). Gia Long's and Tu Duc's tombs are particularly well known to tourists. Some of the structures left behind in Hue by the Nguyen dynasty, a dynasty which had never initiated the building of any construction of public utility, were ruined by US bombing and shelling during the 1968 Tet offensive by the people's forces.

The population of Hue, 200,000 strong, is chiefly concentrated in four old districts north and south of the Perfume River. The Dong Ba trading quarter contains the town's main shops and stores. The Gia Hoi quarter is well known for its old houses with mossy walls and its orchards planted with longane, letchi and jack trees. On the river banks are market gardens

(1) See annexes

tended by poor gardeners. The An Cuu quarter, where the railway station stands, is inhabited by workers, and other labouring people. There you can find the most famous pagodas in the Thua Thien - Hue area (Tu Dam, Bao Quoc, Linh Quang, Tuong Van) as well as the Phu Cam Cathedral and the bishopric of Hue. The Cong-Vi Da market quarter is on the outskirts of Hue to the east and southeast. With its areca groves, its orchards, its houses on stilts, Vi Da, on the bank of the Perfume River, used to provide a quiet retreat for officials and mandarins.

The modern quarters extend to the south of the Perfume River. This was the site of the old administrative centre of the French colonial administration, which included the Palace of the Resident in Annam, the Morin Hotel, the Phu Thua prison, military barracks, the seats of various services and schools (Khai Dinh school, Dong Khanh girls' school, Catholic schools). The Americans and the Saigon administration have built new houses and hotels—the biggest being Thuan Hoa Hotel — in the new Le Loi quarter.

An old capital of the Nguyen dynasty, Hue is the main political, cultural and religious centre of Trung Bo (Central Viet Nam). It remains an administrative and a consumer town with few industrial enterprises (water-station, powerhouse, machine-repair workshops, and a lime kiln at Long Tho). Its population is mostly composed of civil servants, soldiers, merchants, students and school children.

From Feudalism to Colonialism.

In the second half of the 18th century, the land of Phu Xuan (Hue) was put to fire and sword for many decades, in a series of endless wars. After being a battlefield for the armies of the Nguyen and Trinh seigneurs, it was occupied by the Tay Son insurgent troops, and then finally by Gia Long.

The Nguyen dynasty followed an ultra-reactionary policy marked by bloody repression and shameless exploitation of the people, systematic obscurantism and servile submission to foreign powers.

Gia Long savagely repressed the Tay Son insurgents and their followers. "*In the year Nham Tuat* (1802) *during the ceremonies held in honour of the royal ancestors, the chiefs of the bandits under arrest, the pirate Toan* (1) *and the principal and secondary culprits were executed. The corpses of the pirates Nhac and Hue* (1) *were disinterred, crushed to pieces and then thrown away as rubbish, their skulls were used as urinals, the tablets bearing the manes of the pirate Hue and his wife were locked and kept in prison.*" (Dai Nam Thuc Luc Chinh Bien).

The Gia Long Code laid down horrible punishments for all rebels; dismemberment, decapitation, exhibition of the head of the executed man and chopping up of his corpse.

The Thua Thien population was conscripted for the innumerable corvées required by the construction of

1. Tay Son kings

the capital and the royal tombs. It was bled white by the king and his mandarins:

The ministries of war, finance and justice
Collude to rob my little ones of their rice.
(popular song)

My child, remember this:
Pirates despoil you at night, mandarins plunder you in broad daylight. (popular song)

Other popular songs impregnated with bitterness described the people's misery;

My rags are so tattered
That not even a louse can find a place to hide in them.
I would like to dump my burden of misery in the mountain
In vain do I take to my heels, misery keeps on dogging me.

Heavy floods continued to harry the population of Hue. In 1820, a whole portion of the newly built citadel, one kilometre long, was swept away. In 1822, eight thousand metres of wall crumbled down. In 1844, Hue was submerged under ten metres of water; in the province of Thua Thien more than one thousand were drowned, 1,300 houses destroyed and the region was ravaged by famine and epidemics. In 1904, part of the Trang Tien Bridge built in 1897, was carried away by the overflowing Perfume River.

Indifferent to the people's distress, deaf to the appeal of innovating minds, the Nguyen kings did not undertake any reform but closed the door to all progress from the West. The country was kept in the strait-jacket of Confucianism in its most conservative form.

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Education, stagnating in sterile scholastic exercises, was chiefly aimed at turning out mandarins faithful to the crown. Even Minh Mang (1820-1840) who succeeded Gia Long, was compelled to make this acknowledgement: "*Academic literature is limited to rigid stock phrases and mutual dithyrambic eulogies... With this education, it is no wonder that the level of instruction keeps declining.*" (Dai Nam Thuc Luc Chinh Bien).

All kinds of cults and superstitions, except Catholicism, were encouraged by the regime. For a population of a few hundred thousand inhabitants, Thua Thien possessed more than four hundred pagodas and temples.

The French took advantage of the weakness of the Nguyen kings whom they had helped to conquer the country, and began to carry out, step by step, their colonial scheme. French penetration was accomplished in the shadow of the missionaries' cross. In the Hue area, the latter had set up a bridgehead at Phuoc Qua village, sowing discord among the population and preparing the ground for conquest. Using the need to protect foreign missionaries and native Catholics against the Court's hostile measures as a pretext, French troops intervened in Viet Nam. Da Nang came under French attack in 1858, and Saigon was occupied in 1859.

At this critical moment in our history, King Tu Duc was dreaming of building himself a residence for eternity. The construction of the royal tomb was to start effectively in 1864 on the road to Van Nien (Ten Thousand Years), in a hilly region five kilometres

east of the capital. Tens of thousands of soldiers, craftsmen and peasants were toiling day and night:

Your shoulders wear out carrying earth with a shoulder-pole,
While rattan rods scourge your buttocks. (popular song)

The labourers rebelled in September 1866 under the leadership of the scholars Doan Trung and Doan Truc. These two brothers had founded at Bao Quoc Pagoda (Hue) the "Dong Son Brotherhood of the Lovers of Wine and Poetry" as a camouflage for their social and political activities. But an expedition towards the capital to overthrow the tyrant came to grief and the insurgents were convicted of high treason and executed. And so the construction work went on at Van Nien. For thirteen years, Tu Duc closely supervised the arrangement of that magnificent sepulchre which for a long time evoked sad memories in the population of Thua Thien - Hue.

The king died on the 19th of July 1883 after he had led the country to the verge of an abyss. By his mad policy of religious discrimination and xenophobia, he had pushed the Vietnamese Catholics into the French invaders' arms. On August 18, 1883, during the time of the royal funeral, the Thuan An pass, controlling the approche to Hue, came under attack. After a weak resistance, the Court submitted and allowed French troops to be stationed at Mang Ca (1) and on the southern bank of the Perfume

(1) *In Hue*

River. The Harmand treaty signed on March 23, 1884 turned Viet Nam into a French protectorate.

While three kings successively followed each other to the throne within four months, the mandarins broke up into two clans, those who advocated resistance and those who wanted to surrender. The first clan, headed by the Regent Ton That Thuyet, finally carried the day. A surprise attack was prepared against the Mang Ca garrison, then under De Courcy, at one o'clock on July 5, 1885. The coup failed, because the Vietnamese troops were inferior in armaments and badly commanded. At dawn, the French launched a counter-offensive and succeeded in occupying the capital. Ton That Thuyet took the young king Ham Nghi to the north to organize a resistance base in the area of Quang Binh and Quang Tri.

Moving stories are still rémembered about the Hue people's resistance, such as the anecdote of the fruit of the *mu u* tree (callophyllum). These fruit are known for their hard rind and the people collected them in the forests and spread them on the roads where the enemy was expected to pass. They hoped that the French troops, wearing nailed boots, would slip on these balls and became an easy prey for the hidden guerillas. This childish trick proved of no use, but the rows of *mu u* trees now lining several avenues of the royal city remain a symbol of this struggle.

The colonialist soldiery indulged in ruthless killing and plunder. For three days, Hue was on fire, until

July 7, 1885. Each family counted among its members at least one victim of this massacre or one fighter killed in combat. These tragic events are recalled in the famous *ve* (1) "The Fall of the Capital" which contained 3,000 verses composed right after the French occupation. In the 30's of this century, the townsfolk would crowd at Dong Ba market, Thuong Bao landing place, Hue station to listen to this popular song performed by a young strolling girl artist whose warm voice was accompanied by her father Bon playing on a monochord. On the 23rd day of the 5th lunar month, the anniversary of the fall of Hue, throughout the province of Thua Thien, each family was wont to commemorate the dead: on an altar set up in front of the house, were placed a pot of tea, a pile of bowls, a bowl of rice on which burning incense sticks were planted, and sometimes also a water-melon. In Dong Ba and Gia Hoi districts and among the people living in sampans on the Perfume River, there even existed the "Association for Holding Ceremonies Dedicated to Wandering Souls". In some quarters inside the citadel where a large number of inhabitants had been killed, a burning brazier would be put at the foot of a table used as an altar. Near Dong Ba gate, the small "Wandering Souls Chapel" was a place of great resort. Though influenced by superstition, these timid and persistent demonstrations of patriotism on each anniversary of the fall of Hue were nevertheless

(1) A song evoking a contemporary event, often in a satirical vein. See annex : "The Fall of the Capital."

considered as offensive by the colonial authorities who attempted in vain to forbid them.

After Ham Nghi fled, a new king, Dong Khanh, was enthroned and a French *Résident Supérieur* was appointed in Hue. From now on the "Annam" Court was no longer entitled to raise taxes and to mint money. It was compelled to shut down its Ministry of War. The king and his mandarins became mere functionaries in the pay of the colonial administration.

Thanh Thai, who succeeded Dong Khanh, was exiled to Africa in 1907 for his anti-French feelings. His son and successor Duy Tan who was made king at the age of eight, suffered the same fate in 1916. Khai Dinh, picked out from another branch of the royal line, reigned until 1925, leaving behind a reputation of incompetence, debauchery and mental deficiency. The last Nguyen king, Bao Dai, abdicated in 1945 in favour of the revolutionary forces.

Under the colonial regime, simultaneously with the political prostitution of the kings, a new sore was plaguing the Perfume River: real prostitution. As a satirical popular song goes:

The Song Huong (1) flows nonchalantly :
On the water the whore, on the shore, the king.

However, the kings who chose to resist, such as Ham Nghi, Thanh Thai, Duy Tan, were loved by the people who enthusiastically rallied to the movement

(1) the Perfume River

of "Support to the Monarchy" (Can Vuong) launched by Ham Nghi in 1885 and led by patriotic scholars.

During the early years of this century, Hue became a centre for underground activities with Phan Boi Chau as one of the most outstanding figures. One of his favourite disciples, Madame Dinh (Dinh Phu Nhan), was for five years in charge of the liaison service of the secret society led by her teacher, moving to and fro between Hue, Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Nghe An, Haiphong. She was arrested by the French colonialists and handed over to the "Annamese Ministry of Justice". Not even the most savage tortures she suffered in the Thua Thien prison could make her talk. At last, she asked for a night's respite to write down her confession. In fact, she spent her last moments composing an indictment against the colonialists and their flunkeys. Then she bit her fingers and with her blood, she wrote the last three poems of her life on the walls of her cell.

In 1908, the central provinces were shaken by violent popular unrest. Under the scholars' guidance, the peasants demonstrated against the tax increases which had been imposed in spite of the devastations brought about by the typhoons and floods of 1904. Originating from Quang Nam province, the movement spread like wildfire. In six districts of Thua Thien the flag of insurrection was raised by Nguyen Vinh Truy and his disciples Hoang Toai and Do Quynh. In April 1908, short-haired demonstrators (1) from the

(1) In those days, men wore a chignon.

villages and rural districts gathered on the outskirts of Hue before entering the town. In defiance of all blandishments and threats by the troops and collaborating mandarins, the crowd marched on the *Résidence Supérieure* to demand a reduction of taxes. The French administration tried to manœuvre on the pretext that fiscal questions belonged to the indigenous administration. King Duy Tan, then aged eight, was brought to face the crowd, but this failed to calm down the demonstrators. They continued their struggle on April 11, 12 and 13, with the support of townsfolk and students who gave them food and lodging. Afterwards the repression was bloody and Nguyen Vinh Truy was executed.

The First World War offered new opportunities to the patriots. France forcibly mobilized 50,000 soldiers and almost as many workers to serve in Europe. Moreover a huge amount of money and hundreds of thousands of tons of foodstuffs were extorted from Viet Nam.

The scholars Tran Cao Van and Thai Phien, who were members of the "League for the Restoration of Viet Nam" (*Viet Nam Quang Phuc Hoi*) founded by Phan Boi Chau in 1912, established their headquarters in Hue. The former disguised himself as a fisherman and used to hang about the Van Lau landing stage hoping to make contact with King Duy Tan and the patriotic mandarins in his entourage.

To consolidate the French fronts, the colonial administration had withdrawn the bulk of the garrison

of Hue which now included only 50 French soldiers. In May 1916 Tran Cao Van and Thai Phien plotted an insurrection of 2,500 local troops who had been assembled at Mang Ca barracks pending their dispatch to France. They also counted on the help of some mandarins and soldiers of the king, employees in the service of the French settlers and on the concerted action of patriotic organizations in Quang Nam and Quang Ngai. Unhappily, the secret of the revolt leaked out. The French disarmed the auxiliary troops just a few hours before the appointed time. The chiefs of the rebellion were arrested, then killed or exiled. Duy Tan tried to flee from the capital. He was captured and deported to the island of Reunion. The execution of Tran Cao Van and Thai Phien meant the end of the leading role played by scholars in the patriotic movement in the Hue - Thua Thien area.

From Confucian Scholars to Marxist Revolutionaries

At the end of the First World War, Hue still remained a focus of patriotism in Central Viet Nam.

The national resistance carried out under the banners of the monarchy and Confucianism had virtually ended by 1896. At the beginning of the 20th century, modernist scholars began to take over Western ideas imported through the channel of Chinese translations. The bourgeois democratic ideology worked as a new

leaven on old Vietnamese society, the more so as the Japanese victory over Tsarist Russia in 1905 had shaken all of Asia and roused it from its age-old apathy. From 1918 onwards, the struggle for national independence was brewing under other forms in the towns and the countryside.

The patriots devoted considerable efforts to attacking colonial education, which was replacing traditional schooling by a "Franco-Vietnamese" education aimed at recruiting civil servants and training a small number of workers. In 1896, a National School (Quoc Hoc) (1) was opened at Hue, the sole secondary school for the whole of Trung Ky (Central Viet Nam) until the 1930's. Two rebellious pupils of this establishment were to become illustrious in the political arena: Phan Boi Chau began his studies there in 1903; Nguyen Tat Thanh, later known under the names of Nguyen Ai Quoc and Ho Chi Minh, in 1905. They later left the country, the former in 1905 for Japan and the latter in 1910 for France.

Expelled from Japan at the request of the government of Indochina, Phan Boi Chau, the soul of all nationalist uprisings until his arrest in 1925, lived in exile in China and set up in Canton in 1912 the *Viet Nam Quang Phuc Hoi* (League for the Restoration of Viet Nam) which aimed at overthrowing the colonial regime and establishing a Vietnamese republic. He

(1) Later called Khai Dinh Secondary School. Hue also had a Practical Industry School which admitted every year a few dozen pupils out of hundreds of candidates.

was arrested in 1925 and brought back to Viet Nam where he was put under house arrest. He settled in Hue until his death in 1940, living in a hut on the bank of the Perfume River, fanning the flames of patriotism in the young people who used to come and asked for his counsel. He led a frugal life, wore coarse linen and wooden clogs and refused to use French goods.

A revolutionary scholar living in Phan Boi Chau's time, Huynh Thuc Khang, released after thirteen years of jail at Poulo Condore, published in Hue *Tieng Dan* (The People's Voice), a newspaper which, within the legal compass allowed by the French and the Court, defended the rights of the people. He had to face numerous difficulties owing to strict censorship but enjoyed the support of a circle of faithful readers. At that time, the French Senior Resident in Annam was subsidizing several publications which were acting as the mouthpieces of colonialism and collaboration, such as *Trang An, Gazette de Hue, France-Annam*. Nevertheless it could not prevent the new ideas from gaining ground in the royal capital through Chinese and French progressive papers.

The late '20s of the present century were a time of great political ferment in Hue. In 1926, the apprentice-pupils in the first year of the Practical Industry School went on strike, demanding to be taught a craft instead of being used simply as coolies.

Also in 1926, the death of Phan Chu Trinh, the reformist scholar, was the signal for many patriotic demonstrations in Hue and throughout the country.

During a commemorative ceremony held at Tu Dam Pagoda, Phan Boi Chau delivered a moving funeral oration whose diffusion was forbidden by the authorities. When it was his turn to leave the world, in October 1940, he was attended to his last resting place by thousands of Hue patriots, in spite of the rain and an atmosphere of white terrer. It was Huynh Thuc Khang who paid him the last homage. This revolutionary stood out as a protester in the "Trung Ky Consultative Council" (*Hoi Dong Tu Van Trung Ky*) which had been set up for demagogic purposes.

On April 6, 1927, the male students of the *Quoc Hoc* School interrupted their study to protest against a French inspector who had groundlessly turned out four of their schoolmates. Two days later, notwithstanding police intervention, the girl students of this establishment came out in solidarity with their comrades. On April 9, the whole student population of Hue took part in this action.

New underground organizations came into being throughout Viet Nam after 1925. In 1927, the *Tan Viet* (New Viet Nam) Party, which had become more and more influenced by Marxism, held a congress in Hue including intellectuals, teachers, students and former political detainees in Poulo Condore, which elected a National Executive Committee. Two of the best known members of this party were Ton Quang Phiet and Hai Trieu. At the same time, a cell of the *Thanh Nien Cach Mang Dong Chi Hoi* (Association of Young Revolutionary Comrades) was set up in the royal capital,

an organization founded in 1925 in Canton by Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh). This Marxist association was inspired by a clearly set forth theory and definite organizational principles: being the work of the peasant and worker masses directed by a Marxist-Leninist party, the national revolution should be carried out within the framework of world revolution; the Vietnamese people should act in concert with the world proletariat.

In 1929, the Tan Viet network was uncovered by the police and several of its leaders were arrested. Many members of the *Thanh Nien* in Hue were jailed on the same occasion.

The weakness and failure of the nationalist parties, in particular of the *Quoc Dan Dang* (Vietnamese Nationalist Party) made people realize the necessity of creating a strong party capable of leading the national struggle. In 1929, the *Thanh Nien* became two Communist parties while the *Tan Viet* also adopted a Marxist orientation. In February 1930, under the chairmanship of Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh) these three organizations at a meeting in Kowloon (China) merged to form the Vietnamese Communist Party (*Dang Cong San Viet Nam*), later the Indochinese Communist Party. A few months afterwards, the Party Committee for the Thua Thien-Hue area was set up. On the Central Committee's instructions, the militants underwent a process of "proletarianization" by sharing the hard life of the workers and labouring people at the Long Tho lime-kiln, the *Doc Lap* and *Tieng Dan* printing works, the power-

plant, the Practical Industry School... Other revolutionary nuclei were built up in the countryside in such districts as Phong Dien, Phu Loc, Phu Vang, Quang Dien. The underground network extended into many schools.

The first demonstration of strength by the Hue - Thua Thien Party branch took place on Labour Day (May 1st) in 1930. On the night of April 24, lithographed leaflets, streamers, red flags with hammers and sickles appeared in many places, in front of Thuong Tu Gate, the *Résidence Supérieure*, on Gia Vien Bridge, at My Loi and Truoi markets. This was like a clap of thunder for the colonial authorities, because Communism was making its first appearance before the mass of the public. House-to-house searches, seizures, and arrests followed by tortures only increased the masses' symphathy for the patriotic and social movement.

To deceive public opinion, the colonial administration brought back to Hue King Bao Dai who was then studying in France. Reception with solemn rites and poetry competitions were organized; everything was done to try to persuade people that its henchman, by waving some magic wand, could renovate the Court and the regime. The old mandarins at the head of five of the ministries were replaced by younger, allegedly more progressive, ones. Pham Quynh, the protégé of one French clique, succeeded in driving away his rival Ngo Dinh Diem, the instrument of another French clique, in this recasting of the puppet

government. He took charge of the Ministry of Education, which had been created as a propaganda move, while assuming the duties of Director of the Royal Cabinet. Prefectures and sub-prefectures were more and more entrusted to young *tri huyen* trained in the repression of the revolutionary movement and eager for gain and honours. "*These young mandarins are in a morbid haste to make profits*" remarked Léon Sogny, head of the French Sûreté for Trung Ky. Bao Dai soon brought discredit on himself by his fondness for French in preference to the national language, his lust and debauchery, his passion for hunting and his complete lack of interest in public affairs.

From 1930 onwards, the history of the national liberation movement in Viet Nam merged into that of the Indochinese Communist Party founded in that year. In the period up to 1945 , it may be divided into three periods:

1. From 1930 to 1935: big workers' strikes and peasant demonstrations; establishment of the Nghe Tinh Soviets, followed by savage repression and the rebuilding of the movement.

2. From 1936 to 1939, after the Popular Front had been set up in France there was a new revolutionary upsurge in numerous forms, both legal and illegal.

3. From 1939 to 1945: the national struggle was intensified, the Viet Minh League was founded in 1941, and armed insurrections took place which finally ended in the victory of the August 1945 Revolution.

Kept firmly under the colonial yoke and directly under the rule of an ultra-reactionary Court, Trung Ky (Central Viet Nam) and Hue in particular did not, during that period which was to be so decisive for the country's fate, experience such an intense ferment as the North (Bac Ky) and the South (Nam Ky). But, on the whole, the struggle went through the same stages. In the '30s the confrontation between conservative and progressive forces gave rise to polemics which echoed throughout the country and enhanced the prestige of Marxism, the Communist Party and its line in the struggle for national independence.

In a series of articles published in *Trang An*, Phan Khoi, a Confucian scholar who had acquired a superficial stock of Western ideas, took up the cudgels for idealism in the philosophical field, and concluded: "*We, Annamese, should find ourselves and realize in a sincere manner that we are inferior materially because we are inferior spiritually. Our ideas are on a level with European thinking in the Middle Ages, they are still gloomy and clumsy.*" Hai Trieu, a Marxist journalist originally from Hue and released from prison in 1932, made a brilliant criticism of Phan Khoi's anti-national views. It was he, too, who together with other Party theoreticians conducted a victorious polemic in such papers as *Doi moi* (New Life), *Dan* (People), *Tin tuc* (News), *Tin moi* (New Information), *Dan tien* (The People's Progress), *Song Huong* (The Perfume River), against the partisans of "Art for Art's sake", a theory encouraged by colonial cultural policy, which hoped to use it to divert the people and youth from the revolutionary path.

In 1935, the upsurge of the democratic movement in France caused colonialists to slacken their pressure on Viet Nam. Many revolutionaries in Thua Thien-Hue were released and urban organizations of democratic youth and peasant organizations recorded new developments. The Communist Party's underground network was consolidated and the resolutions of the Congress of the Communist International (August 1935) and the Party's Central Committee could be rapidly diffused.

In order to prevent Hue from joining in the political campaign which was being waged in Hanoi and Saigon for the holding of an Indochinese Congress where various social strata and groups would put forward their demands, the French Résidence Supérieure in Annam (Central Viet Nam) entrusted its flunkey Le Thanh Canh with the job of creating a diversion. It was to no avail. Rallied by the Party, 400 people met on September 20, 1936, in the royal capital to set up the Annam Provisional Committee. Workers, peasants, intellectuals, journalists, bourgeois, land-owners, retired mandarins and personalities representing various social strata and the most diverse tendencies, attended the event. Greatly alarmed, the authorities called upon the Annam Provisional Committee to present its demands before September 25, 1936. These dealt with the increase of wages; reduction of working hours, taxes, fines; the redistribution of communal lands; village reforms; freedom of the press and freedom of assembly; release of political detainees...

The dissolution of the Indochinese Congress did not prevent Marxist ideas from gaining ground in Hue - ThuaThien through the Party's papers such as *Nhanh lua* (Ear of Rice), *Dan* (the People), and the bookshops which diffused progressive literature coming from Hanoi, Saigon, France and China. But those who read such literature were noted down in the black list of the French Sûreté.

Hoping to calm things down, the French government sent Justin Godart to Indochina to report back on the desires of the population. Before Godart's arrival, the Annam administration took its precautions: the political prisoners released previously were given severe warnings and the French Resident in Thua Thien ordered the headmasters not to let their pupils go and welcome the Paris envoy. To deter the population from waiting for Justin Godart, the date of his arrival was not made known to the public. Nevertheless, peasants, bringing with them food for three days, kept waiting patiently in order to produce their demands. The pupils of secondary schools jumped over the hedges as soon as they learnt of Godart's arrival to gather at the appointed place and present their wishes. On his trip from Hue to Da Nang, the car of this French government representative was intercepted at Ban Mon by 3,000 peasants who had assembled there for the purpose.

In 1937, under the sponsorship of the Thua Thien - Hue section of the Indochinese Democratic Front, some patriots were elected to the "House of People's Representatives" in Annam where they secured the

posts of President, Vice-President and Secretary-General. This body was intended to serve as an instrument of the colonial regime and was soon ordered to give its approval to a new bill for tax increases in Annam. Money was to be collected through Court channels in order to build up the units of native soldiers in anticipation of new international difficulties. Though the authorities used a combination of the stick and the carrot on the representatives, the tax bill had to be shelved on account of pressure from public opinion.

From 1930 to 1939, the Hue - Thua Thien section of the Communist Party which numbered 76 members in 16 Party cells for the town and the rural districts, led the patriotic struggle with the active collaboration of 500 members of underground youth and women's organizations and trade-unions. Some of the militants steeled in the struggles of 1936 - 1938 were later to become brilliant leaders such as Nguyen Chi Thanh, To Huu, Hoang Anh.

World War II put an end to this interlude of liberalization in the colonies. On September 28, 1939, the Governor General of Indochina, Catroux, outlawed the Communist Party, dissolved the trade-unions and prohibited all gatherings and "Communist" propaganda. On October 5, a royal order issued by Bao Dai reproduced the prohibitions of the September 28 decree. Sogny, an old fox at the head of the French Sûreté in Annam, succeeded by threats and corruption in planting agents within the leading body of the Party organization for the Thua Thien - Hue area and

for the whole of Trung Ky (Annam). He managed to lay hands on the main leaders. Members of the Hue section of the Democratic Youth Front were also arrested.

32 Party members were sentenced to imprisonment for from one to five years. When they heard the verdict, the condemned men shouted: "Down with French aggressive imperialism! Long live independent Viet Nam!" At a session of the tribunal, a judge, Dang Thanh Don, insolently asked Le Thi Que:

"Even men are rotting in chains without being able to do anything. What can women of your sort do, when you can't even truss up a chicken? So why are you aping others in trying to make a revolution?"

The condemned woman rejoined calmly:

"Women who love their country and people are worth more than men like you, who put yourself at the service of the French and sell out your country and people."

The years 1939-41 were years of trial for the Hue - Thua Thien Party section. Its network was disrupted, its cadres were put in jail and all information about the country and the world was carefully sifted by the official press. In the Thua Thien jail a fierce battle was fought to keep alive the revolutionary flame. In April 1940, Le Chuong, a member of the Executive Committee of the Party organization for Trung Ky (Annam), was subjected to the hardest tortures, which brought him to the verge of death.

The political detainees clung to the bars and staged a vehement demonstration, shouting: "We protest against the savage tortures!", "We demand to be treated as political prisoners!". They held firm against the repression and Le Chuong was sent to a hospital. He was afterwards sentenced to five years' imprisonment but escaped in 1941. Leading members of the Party such as Nguyen Chi Thanh, To Huu, took advantage of their stay in prison to consolidate their theoretical knowledge, exchange with other militants experiences on revolutionary work and go on with their organizational tasks. To Huu's poems came out of the prison cells and fanned the people's faith in the revolution.

Moreover, the Party began to turn towards the countryside. In 1940, a group of Communists at Phu Loc issued an underground paper, *Vì nước* (For the Country), which circulated among the youth. The reaction grew fiercer. Those detainees considered as dangerous were transferred from the Thua Phu prison (in Hue) to Lao Bao and Ban Me Thuot jails in the highlands. In the province of Thua Thien, former political detainees and sympathizers with the revolution were concentrated in Uu Diem and La Hy camps (north and south of Hue) and subjected to harsh treatment.

In May 1942, Nguyen Chi Thanh escaped from prison and came back to Hue to resume contact with the Phu Loc Communist group. He consolidated the Party Provincial Committee for Thua Thien whose secretary he became until mid-1943 when he was again

arrested. But he had had time to ensure the application of the measures decided upon by the Party's Central Committee in the face of the new internal and international situation.

From September 1940 onwards, French Indochina had, for all practical purposes, fallen under Japanese rule, especially with the signing of the "Nippo French Common Defence Treaty" (July 23, 1941) which allowed Japan to station troops in Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia.

In May 1941, the Central Committee of the Indochinese Communist Party held a plenary session in Viet Bac (North Viet Nam) under the chairmanship of Ho Chi Minh. It was decided to step up preparations for armed insurrection and to found the *Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh* or *Viet Minh* (League for the Independence of Viet Nam) whose aim was to liberate the country from the double yoke of the French and Japanese.

Hue soon experienced bitter days under Japanese occupation. A Japanese Consulate was set up there. Japanese troops poured into the town and the Japanese military police was ruling the roost. The population of Thua Thien province had to toil as coolies both for the French (in the construction of Road No. 14 and the digging of underground arms depots) and the Japanese (in the repair of bridges and roads and the construction of trenches and shelters). In 1943 famine broke out in many places.

Pro-Japanese parties and organizations were very active. The Japanese Consulate became crowded with

visitors while the press published a profusion of articles to glorify "Greater Asia", the "Co-prosperity Sphere", the "liberation of the smaller peoples" etc... More and more courses were started to teach Japanese. During the night of March 9, 1945, the Japanese overthrew the French regime in Indochina. On March 10, the Japanese army seized control of Hue, after defeating General Turquin's troops stationed at Mang Ca (2,000 French soldiers), Courcy barracks (300 auxiliary troops) and in the barracks of the local constabulary (300 men). On March 11, on orders from the Japanese authorities Bao Dai convoked his Secret Council to proclaim "the independence of Viet Nam". To complete this comedy, a new government was called into being by the Japanese — without any ministry for Defence and Finance and entrusted, to the resentment of Ngo Dinh Diem who had been courting them for a long time to one of their stooges Tran Trong Kim. Pro-Japanese parties entered the stage: the *Dai Viet* (Great Viet Nam) the *Quoc Dan Dang* (Vietnamese Nationalist Party) and the *Thanh Nien Ai Quoc* (Patriotic Youth), extolling national independence with a Japanese seasoning.

Meanwhile famine had begun to rage in Thua Thien province as well as in North Viet Nam. Even such rice-producing areas as Quang Dien district were running short of food. Starving people were falling in the markets and the streets of Hue. A popular song said, with bitterness:

What is this independence of Viet Nam?
Just a Nipponese as a boss instead of a Frenchman.

With this kind of independence
We'll all end up dead under the yoke of the Japs.

1945 : the End of Old Hue

However, the revolution which had been brewing now made rapid progress throughout the country. Events were moving fast.

In January 1945, Hong Xich Tam, a special envoy of the Party Committee for Annam, passed on the Viet Minh constitution and other instructions of the Central Committee to the Hue section.

On May 23, the Party members in charge of the Hue - Thua Thien area met in three boats moored at the middle of the Cau Mai lagoon, 40km from the capital : the meeting was to discuss preparations for an insurrection to seize power.

The task was not an easy one. The Japanese had a 4,500-strong garrison in Thua Thien, the Tran Trong Kim "government" possessed 300 Bao An guards (Security Police) and a number of young people were enrolled in the pro-Japanese para-military organization "Front-line Youth" (*Thanh nien tien tuyen*). Several well-known intellectuals who were present in Hue were apparently caught in the trap of "pseudo-independence". How could the still sparse revolutionary forces alter such a delicate and unfavourable situation ?

Instructions had been issued by the Central Committee on March 12 in the article : "The French and the Japanese have started shooting at each other. What must we do ?" In the light of these directives, a decision was adopted after several days of discussion : rapid action should be taken so as not to miss the opportunity.

The Viet Minh provincial committee for Hue - Thua Thien was set up with 17 members and an executive committee of five (Nguyen Son, Hoang Anh, Lê Tu Dong...). This group was soon joined by another Viet Minh group composed of Hue students and civil servants in direct contact with Hanoi. The prestige of the Viet Minh continued to rise. Now that Japanese policy had thrown off its mask, the slogan : "Struggle against the Japanese fascists and French colonialists", won over the masses. The Viet Minh of Phu Loc intercepted two Japanese junks carrying rice on the Tu Hien sound and distributed its cargo to the famished local people.

In the period before the Japanese capitulation (August 15, 1945) to the Allies, the Viet Minh advocated a policy of avoiding provocations and neutralizing the Japanese troops in Indochina by helping them understand the struggle of the Vietnamese people for national independence.

On August 15, the uprising was launched in the province of Thua Thien and Hue, with To Huu as the president of the insurrectional committee. Ton Quang Phiet and Hoang Anh persuaded the Tran Trong Kim administration to resign and Le Tu Dong won over to the Viet Minh the officers of the

Bao An (Security Police) and the cadres of the Military School. In the countryside, most of the "Frontline Youths" rallied to the cause of the Viet Minh. Many village heads and district chiefs handed over their seals to the people.

The victory of the insurrection in Hanoi (August 19) threw Hue - Thua Thien into a new wave of enthusiasm. All the districts set up revolutionary power.

However, the French colonialists did not remain idle, hoping to resume their former position with the arrival of Allied troops sent to disarm the Japanese army. They were infiltrating through Laos or parachuted over Thua Thien to make contact with the French men still in Hue. The Insurrectional Committee judged it necessary to arrest such former French henchmen as Pham Quynh, Nguyen Tien Lang, Ngo Dinh Khoi.

On August 22, it took measures for an insurrection in the capital. In the evening, feverish preparations went on in every quarter : the townsfolk made red flags with golden stars, stuck posters on walls, and erected altars to the fatherland. The countryside was animated as never before. Food was collected for a march on the town. The rivers, Road No. I and the railway were flooded with flags and streamers.

On August 23 in the morning, the Insurrectional Committee sent an ultimatum to Bao Dai, calling upon him to hand over power to the people. At noon, it transmitted to the king the following message from the National Insurrectional Committee.

"The National Liberation Committee of Viet Nam appointed by the People's Congress, assuming the tasks of a provisional government to settle internal and external affairs, calls on His Majesty to proclaim his abdication before the nation and the world, before the National Liberation Committee and the Provisional Government."

Bao Dai convened his rachitic cabinet and agreed to give up the throne.

A 4.30 p.m. in Hue Stadium, a historic meeting took place before a crowd of 150,000. To Huu, the president of the Insurrectional Committee, solemnly proclaimed the abolition of the old regime and introduced the provisional popular revolutionary committee headed by Ton Quang Phiet. Amidst the resounding insurrectional song of Thua Thien - Hue : "Workers, peasants and soldiers, let us raise our flag!", the red flag with a golden star was hoisted in front of Ngo Mon gate.

On August 24, a delegation of the new provincial administrative committee called on the Japanese Consul General and the officer commanding the Japanese garrison stationed in Hue to inform them of the recent changes, and offered a guarantee of security to the Japanese troops if they would abstain from all hostile acts pending their repatriation.

President Ho Chi Minh appointed a delegation to attend Bao Dai's abdication ceremony which took place on August 30, in front of Ngo Mon gate. The last Nguyen king handed back the emblems of royalty : The gold seal weighing nearly ten kilograms (dating

back to Ming Mang's time) and the sword with its jade-inlaid sheath. In the presence of a 60,000-strong crowd, the head of the delegation read a declaration of the Provisional government which began with these words:

"Fellow-countrymen! National history has entered a new epoch. The monarchy has been superseded by a republic. This meets the aspirations of our entire people and keeps pace with the forward march of history. The republic is in no way a free gift, it is the result of the patient struggle of innumerable fighters and of the popular masses over long decades..."

The following slogans rang out: "Long live the Provisional Government" "Long live Viet Nam's independence!", "Long live the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam!"

The Provincial Committee and the Municipal Committee took over the royal premises and drew up an inventory of all the property which, apart from Bao Dai's personal belongings, should revert to the revolutionary State.

The newly-founded Republic had to face tremendous difficulties: an empty treasury, famine, illiteracy, foreign invasion. Chiang Kai-shek's troops occupied the Northern part of the country above the 16th parallel (south of Thua Thien). Under their shield, the reactionary parties started carrying out intensive sabotage work. In Hue, French-paid agents and reactionary Catholics coached by Drapier, a papal nuncio installed at Phu Cam, started to raise their heads.

With the rest of the nation, Hue launched a triple offensive against famine, illiteracy and invasion.

The town's parks were planted with sweet potatoes and vegetables. Each household kept a jar for saving rice and a handful of rice was put into it at every meal. Party cadres and state officials spared a portion of their weekly ration to help combat the famine. In the evening "popular education" courses were organized. Pupils and teachers, showed equal eagerness. Gambling, prostitution and other social evils were eradicated.

The youth of both sexes enthusiastically joined self-defence units and the regular army. Crash military training courses were held. Three French officers who had escaped from the Japanese were arrested near Thuan An. Six others under captain Castella who attempted to parachute into Hien Si (Phong Dien) suffered the same fate.

Hue - Thua Thien sent 7 elected deputies to the DRVN First National Assembly. Popular Councils set up in provinces, towns and villages, consolidated the revolutionary power.

Old Hue was gone. A new era began.

The Binh-Tri-Thien Front in the First Resistance War (1946 - 1954)

THANH TIN

The provinces of Quang Binh, Quang Tri and Thua Thien extend for 300 kilometres along a narrow strip of land in northern Trung Bo (Central Viet Nam). They have a low density of population and are poor in natural resources, but strategically they occupy a position of paramount importance.

In the resistance against the French colonialists as well as in the struggle against US aggression, this area, called Binh Tri Thien for short, was the scene of fierce battles, the results of which influenced the development of the war as a whole.

I

Salient Features

1. General character

The Binh Tri Thien sector is sandwiched between the sea in the east and the Truong Son Range in the west. Economically, the land is little developed. The erosive action of the rivers impoverishes a land which is

already infertile. The soil is mostly sandy and acid, containing brackish water, hence giving a low productivity. Here, the peasants eat more tubers (sweet potatoes or cassava) than rice. Industry, ever since the French occupation, has been virtually non-existent. Handicrafts are poorly developed. Under the old regime, the population, numbering about one million, wrested a bare living.

In addition, this sector, like the southernmost provinces of Nam Bo, has been, today as in the past, the theatre of some of the hardest-fought operations of the resistance fighters.

In the political field, Binh Tri Thien is one of the lands most attached to the revolution. It witnessed the Can Vuong (Support the King) insurrection in the early days of French domination, the revolutionary movement of 1930-1931 led by the Indochinese Communist Party and the Revolution of August 1945.

It was here that the Nguyen kings built their capital city, Hue, the heart of the feudal reactionary forces.

This economic and political context explains the acuteness of the class struggle waged in this region in the course of history.

2. Characteristics of the theatre of operations

Binh Tri Thien is a narrow coastal plain hemmed in between mountains in the west and a long sea coast in the east and watered by rivers which run through it crosswise, such as the Perfume River, the My Chanh, Thach Han, Cam Lo, Ben Hai, Nhat Le, Dao and Gianh rivers, to name only a few of the

main ones. This topography is far from favourable to the movements of troops, the use of motorized vehicles or the rapid concentration of forces.

The waterways form important means of communication and the region is also served by vital roads and railways. National Road No. I linking Hanoi to Hue and Saigon and the trans-Indochina railway line which runs parallel to it were two essential channels for the movement of enemy troops and the transport of their war material. The strategic Road No. 9, starting from the town of Dong Ha crosses the Truong Son range to reach Savannakhet in Laos. This is the most important connecting line between the Vietnamese and Lao fronts. Medium-sized seaports such as Thuan An, Tu Hien, Cua Viet, Cua Tung, Cua Nhat Le, Cua Don, Cua Gianh can be used for war vessels.

Many airfields (old and new) such as Phu Bai, Tay Loc (Hue), Dong Ha, Quang Tri and Dong Hoi enabled the enemy to carry out coordinated actions with his Navy.

3. Aims of the French colonialists

Binh Tri Thien had always been a strategic sector of the utmost importance for the French colonialists in their aggression against Viet Nam and the two other Indochinese countries, Laos and Cambodia.

To occupy and pacify it, to break the "carrying pole" (1) in order to separate the North from the South,

(1) The central part of Viet Nam was likened to a shoulder pole carrying two baskets of rice, the northern and southern parts. *Ed.*

and then to wipe out these two theatres of operations one by one — this was routine colonialist "divide and rule" policy, i.e. "separate in order to annihilate."

In their eyes the region was also a spring-board from which, at a favourable time, they could invade the three large, populated and rich provinces of the liberated zone: Ha Tinh, Nghe An and Thanh Hoa. If they succeeded in occupying this powerful rear base of the resistance, they would be able to complete the conquest of the country.

In the political field, they contemplated bringing back those feudal landowners toppled by the August 1945 Revolution who would remain loyal to the "mother country", and strove to restore the Nguyen in the old capital of Hue in order to use the latter as a tool for their colonial policy.

To this end, they unceasingly increased their military potential in that sector. At the beginning, taking advantage of the provisions of the March 6, 1946 preliminary accord, they sent 750 men to Hue, supposedly to relieve Chiang Kai-shek's troops. They also despatched a "fifth column" of 250 French civilians, bringing their effective force in the city to over one thousand men.

With reinforcements coming from France and the mercenaries pressed on the spot, enemy forces in Binh Tri Thien exceeded 10,000 men at the end of 1949, reaching 25,000 in early 1951 and 30,000, their maximum, in June 1952, composed of legionaries, paratroops, North African troops, French motorized units,

auxiliary troops, guards, mobile guards and rural militia... belonging to all arms and services: air force, navy, armour, artillery, engineers, etc.

The French Expeditionary Corps and their local mercenaries committed untold atrocities. Their policy was to "kill all, burn all, destroy all" and they carried out continuous raids and mopping-up operations to subdue the population and sever them from the revolutionary army and administration. The names of Cho Can (Trieu Phong), Cho Chua (Gio Linh), Sang (Le Thuy), Cu Nam, Canh Duong (Quang Binh), so many Vietnamese Oradours and Lidices, perpetuate the memory of the bloody crimes of the colonialists and the heroism of the people of Binh Tri Thien.

II

First Period: Encirclement of the Enemy and Preservation of the People's Armed Forces (December 19, 1946 - February 1947)

From the night of December 19, 1946, which marked the launching of national resistance up to February 1947, the enemy positions in Hue were surrounded. Surprise attacks, shellings, harassments exacted a toll of 250 enemy troops, or more than a quarter of the French garrison. Meanwhile, in the North, Hanoi, Haiphong and Nam Dinh were besieged and the enemy had to bring in supplies by air.

However, with regard to material means, there was clear inequality. The French colonialists had

their barracks surrounded by barbed wire and obstacles and were equipped with tanks, armoured vehicles, heavy guns, mortars, and machine-guns ; while the revolutionary army had only rudimentary weapons and even not enough rifles.

That battle which lasted in various forms for over two months steeled our armed forces in technique, enriched their experience and contributed to the development of the resistance.

Early in February 1947, reinforcements were hastily despatched from France. The High Commissioner d'Argenlieu and General Leclerc calculated that, with the release of French troops at the end of World War II, they would be able to control the situation and wipe out Vietnamese resistance in a matter of weeks.

The French expeditionary corps mounted big clearing operations in North Viet Nam and Trung Bo.

In Thua Thien province, at dawn on January 17, 1947, 5,000 French troops disembarked on the shore of Thua Luu and Lang Co. Enemy columns starting from Hue and arriving at Quang Tri on February 16 and Dong Ha by the end of the same month, effected a junction with over a thousand men coming down Highway 9. On March 27, 1947, the French occupied Dong Hoi, capital of Quang Binh. But this big offensive, aimed at wiping out our regular forces and bringing the war to a rapid end, just fizzled out. The fact that we knew how to preserve our forces was a success of great strategic importance as it

created the premises for the continuation and extension of the resistance.

The breaking of our front made it possible for French troops to capture some terrain. But the popular struggle was gradually and steadily put back on its feet and the people's war developed. The Binh Tri Thien theatre of operations was making a greater and greater contribution to the common victory.

III

Period of Re-establishment of Bases, with Military Activities Gradually Resumed

I. A timely resolution

After the breaching of our front by the violent French offensive, on March 25 a provincial conference of resistance cadres was opened in the hilly area west of Thua Thien, presided over by Nguyen Chi Thanh, a member of the Central Committee of the Party and chairman of the Viet Minh Front in Trung Bo.

The meeting analysed the situation in the province within the framework of the national resistance and took an important decision :

— To continue the armed resistance, resolutely fight the rural puppet authorities and traitors, strengthen the people's confidence in the Government, the Party and the national resistance following the line : a long resistance of all the people in all fields.

— To step up production, practise thrift, conceal food and belongings, establish resistance bases for a long struggle ;

— The cadres of various levels should go back to their bases, return to the plains and cling to the population ; holding firmly to the resistance bases.

— To consolidate the leadership of the Party, the Front, the administration, simplify organization, maintain steady communication in order to guarantee the effectiveness of the directives, decisions and policies issued.

— To reorganize the army, militia, guerilla units, security services, restore military activities within a short time, put the accent on guerilla warfare while creating conditions favourable to mobile warfare.

Nguyen Chi Thanh pointed out : " To lose ground does not mean to lose the country. We must win to our cause hamlets and inhabitants, one by one, never becoming estranged from the population. Cadres and Party members will carry out the watchword: Rather die than abandon the base. "

After the conference, everyone went back to his post, full of redoubled confidence and energy, pledged to a concrete plan of action.

The rapid restoration of the situation in Thua Thien was a valuable experience for the two neighbouring provinces of Quang Tri and Quang Binh which, in their turn, were to face great difficulties.

2. Mushrooming of resistance bases

In implementation of the resolution, resistance bases were immediately established :

— Thua Thien base: in Hoa My jungle (at the rise of the O Lau river, in the rocky massif of Phong Dien district).

— Quang Tri base : in Ba Long valley (along the Thach Han river whose fertile banks are hemmed in by almost inaccessible mountains).

— Quang Binh base : at Thuan Duc (west of Dong Hoi provincial capital, at the foot of the Truong Son range). That base was later moved to Tuyen Hoa (northwest of the province).

Relying on remote and difficult mountains, the resistance bases were the seats of the leading organs and the liaison services with the central government and the places where important meetings were held. Gradually army workshops, logistic departments, pharmacies (manufacturing medicines on the spot for the army) and military hospitals were set up there, and, along with them, cadres' training schools, and workshops for printing pamphlets, newspapers, documents, books...

The supply of food to the base was made by local agricultural farms, which grew rice, maize, sweet potatoes, cassava and vegetables and practised animal breeding, fishing and hunting.

Army units came there for training, relaxation and replenishing their forces and attending political courses. From there they returned to the plains and other theatres of operation.

At district level, there were also resistance bases lesser in extent but pursuing the same ends. In some

districts where the revolutionary movement was strong these bases were set up in the plain, as in Trieu Phong district, Quang Tri province. Resistance committees, Party Committees and military organs of the district, with reduced personnel in order to be as mobile as possible, were set up in the plains and near enemy posts. Repeated moppings-up could neither destroy nor remove them.

3. Aims of the enemy

The enemy wanted a blitzkrieg. And so they mounted continuous raids and mopping-up operations in the hope of encircling and annihilating our regular forces. By means of "oil-stain" tactics, they tried to broaden the zone under their control.

They built military posts in 'pacified' areas, sought out the services of their former agents and set up a political base by organizing reactionary elements especially in certain areas which contained a strong Catholic majority and where an out-and-out psychological war was waged, using blackmail and corruption, and sowing division between Catholics and non-Catholics and between the population and the revolutionary power.

They made a particular effort to behead our leading organs, harass our cadres and liquidate our resistance bases.

By the end of May 1948, besides 16 barracks and camps in the city of Hue, there were 70 military posts in Thua Thien province. Together with 69 posts in

Quang Tri province and 39 in Quang Binh, they constituted a close network of posts from 2 to 6 km. apart, aimed at keeping the population in a vast repressive system.

At the beginning of 1948, the enemy's effective forces totalled 8,193 distributed as follows;

3,518 men in Thua Thien
2,799 men in Quang Tri
1,876 men in Quang Binh

These contingents of French soldiers, and North African and local mercenaries served in units of legionaries, paratroops, gunners, guards and were under the command of Brigadier Le Bris, Colonel de la Roque, his assistant, and Colonel Coste, the chief of staff.

On the political plane, the colonialists worked hard to establish the puppet administration at various levels: province and district, and among reactionary parties and factions such as the Quoc Dan Dang (Vietnamese Kuomintang) and Dai Viet (Great Viet Nam). They pressganged mercenaries en masse and built up many local auxiliary units: Viet Binh Doan (auxiliary units), Bao Ve Quan (guards), Huong Ve (rural militia). Schools were opened for the training of N.C.Os for these units.

On the economic plane, the colonialists and their henchmen did their best to destroy crops and foodstuffs to provoke a famine, subjugate the population and put the resistance forces in difficulty. They killed buffaloes and oxen to deprive our farmers

of means of traction, destroyed and burnt farm tools and the boats of the coastal dwellers. They got hold of the paddy, seized the standing crops or crushed them with their tracked vehicles. In 1947, due to a long drought in May and heavy floods in August and September, the crop was bad in these three provinces. The army and the people had to live in great privation, living on thin soup and sweet potatoes. But morale was not lowered. On the contrary hatred for the enemy grew even stronger. Neither natural calamities nor the crimes committed by the enemy could shake the people's confidence in the resistance.

4. Resistance

After the breaking up of the front, our forces, which had remained intact, gradually regrouped. They immediately launched armed attacks and these, despite their small size, stirred echoes among the population.

On March 24, 1947, a small unit broke into Hue and attacked Ho Thanh, a military post in the ancient Citadel and the seat of the puppet administration. Three well-known traitors and 15 mercenaries were punished. Leaflets were distributed to serve warning on the traitors and to call the people to the resistance. This exploit of a unit which withdrew unscathed after fulfilling its mission sowed confusion among the enemy.

The news of this raid launched only one month after the collapse of the front spread all over the province, and had deep repercussions among the population.

A few days later, on March 29, 1947, after careful preparations, another small commando unit stormed

the French post at Dat Do (Thua Thien) near My Chanh. At first, a group disguised as labourers was led by a sham *ly truong* (village headman) into the barracks for forced labour. Once inside, they hurled hand grenades. From the outside, another group attacked and wiped out a French platoon, capturing two soldiers. We seized 3 submachine guns, 5 mortars, 11 rifles, 150 hand grenades, 1 machine gun, and set free 40 people detained by the enemy.

This feat of arms created an immediate sensation all over the sector. After this we redoubled our attacks on the traitors, French troops and mercenaries in open country and around the towns. Guerilla activities rapidly revived and our regular forces intensified their attacks.

Binh Tri Thien was stimulated by the resistance which was developing in the North and South of the country. The resolutions passed in the resistance cadres' conferences in the sector or provinces were translated into action by the population and the armed forces.

By the end of 1947, the guerillas and regular forces in the three provinces had fought 212 battles, during which 4,270 enemy troops were killed and 1,000 wounded. Having restored our bases we began to develop them and complete our equipment with weapons captured from the enemy and then improved, such as various types of bombs made from enemy shells and used chiefly for ambushing convoys and destroying communication lines. In the beginning, around February 1947, each of our companies had

been equipped with some forty firearms; now each had about a hundred. Our forces increased rapidly as the youth enthusiastically volunteered to join the army. The technical formation of combatants became a mass movement. Our regular forces and guerilla units increased in number and quality.

In 1948, our resistance kept its impetus in Binh Tri Thien. After Tet (February) the enemy launched a powerful mopping-up operation at Ba Lang (Quang Tri), but after being intercepted everywhere and suffering heavy losses (over 200 deaths) they were obliged to beat a retreat without having succeeded in destroying our base.

At the end of February, two companies were airdropped on Bong (a base in the west of Le Thuy district, Quang Binh province) where they burned dwelling houses and offices, but, after taking 200 casualties, they hurriedly fell back on Dong Hoi. Almost simultaneously, two battalions, with supporting air cover, launched a big mopping-up operation against the resistance base in the north of Thua Thien. Our detachments in charge of defence and the local guerillas used bombs and mines to harass them by ambushing their columns or storming their camps. The enemy was forced to retreat, leaving behind 300 corpses. Our resistance bases were further consolidated and were able to resist the aggressors more effectively. Our organs were expanding and we were self sufficient in food.

In March 1948 the enemy launched a large-scale mopping-up in Cho Can plain (Trieu Phong district

Quang Tri province). The French command and legionaries took vengeance on the guerillas by massacring the civilian population. They raped about a hundred women, set fire to hamlets and boats and burnt paddy reserves in over ten villages. In the villages of Linh Yen and Phong Tranh, they threw children into the fire and disembowelled old people. In one day, they killed 900 people including a great number of children, old folk and women. At My Thuy village, out of 426 inhabitants only 24 women who had gone to a distant market, were able to escape the slaughter. The memory of this massacre kindled deep hatred in the hearts of our fellow-countrymen.

On April 7, 1948, near the ravaged region, one of our companies wiped out a French platoon operating at Dong Duong (Hai Lang district), captured 6 prisoners, seized 1 mortar, 3 light machine guns and 20 rifles. That battle is remembered as an example of good coordination between mobile warfare and ambush. It showed the remarkable progress made by our armed forces after a period of hard training.

In April and May 1948, the enemy lost 176 killed (including 77 French soldiers and a French captain), 57 wounded (31 Frenchmen), 39 prisoners (8 Frenchmen) and about one hundred firearms.

From May to August 1948, all through the sector, our armed forces took part in a powerful emulation drive launched by the people's army throughout the country.

The resistance was making great strides.

IV
Autumn Winter of 1948 and the Beginning of 1949

A farsighted initiative: the formation of independent companies and battalion-size groups

1. French colonialists' manoeuvres

After the failure of their blitzkrieg strategy and their large-scale operation against our national resistance base (in Viet Bac) at the beginning of 1948, the French had to face a prolongation of the war. Their new policy was "*To pit Vietnamese against Vietnamese and feed the war by the war.*"

As reinforcements from France proved to be insufficient, they pressganged local people into the army, and looted the food and property of the population. They did their best to "pacify" region after region, giving priority to populated plains, communication lines and the peripheries of towns and urban centres. They set up "mobile groups" (MG) in provinces and districts to launch mopping-up operations and counter our military activities.

2. Our options

During that period our military activities were based on the following slogan: "Guerilla warfare is essential, mobile warfare secondary; train for mobile warfare."

In Binh-Tri-Thien guerilla warfare was all the more important as the theatre of operations made all concentration of troops difficult and our forces and

the enemy's overlapped one another, the High Command and the Party Committee in the army advocated the formation all over the country of "independent companies" and "battalion-size groups". In each district, an "independent company" served as a core for guerilla warfare and in each region involving several districts, a strong and fairly well-equipped battalion was mustered for annihilation attacks, so as to give greater support to guerilla warfare and gradually increase the level of annihilation attacks.

These independent companies operating all over the place and the battalion groups which would deal hard blows in a given sector complemented each other to form a complete and unified system governed by this guiding principle: using guerilla warfare as the essential form of combat while gradually increasing the role of mobile warfare.

In the Binh Tri Thien sector, the military command paid great attention to coordinating military activities in the three provinces under a unified direction so that reinforcements might be easily sent from one province to another.

The sector command and various military, political and logistic organizations had to be strengthened and rapidly streamlined in order to direct and take command of the armed forces in the three provinces.

3. Our activities

According to our general strategy which consisted in actively maintaining the balance of forces, our

military activities were gradually stepped up in all the three provinces.

Between September 16 and 25, 1948, the enemy launched a big mopping-up operation against the Ba Long resistance base (Quang Tri province) hoping to nip the Winter-Spring campaign in the bud. Sixty motor vehicles were used together with war planes and gunboats. Our two training battalions, which were also in charge of protecting our resistance base, fought the enemy for nine days and nights, killing 300 men (including three French officers: one major, one captain and one lieutenant), injuring 100 others, destroying 7 motor vehicles, damaging one motor launch, and sinking 39 junks. We combined ambushes with surprise attacks and guerilla warfare, and used home made-bombs, mines and booby-traps to harass the enemy and thin down his forces.

In a big ambush laid by two of our companies at Kole Chanh-Hoi Mit (south of Thua Thien) on January 12, 1949, we wiped out a military train, killed 45 Frenchmen including some officers, wrecked one 75-mm gun, 4 wagons of ammunition and damaged one locomotive. Meanwhile, one of our battalions waylaid another train at Lang Co, killing 300 of the enemy and capturing 190 rifles, 10 sub-machine guns and 30 light machine guns.

These were well-concerted and well-commanded operations. We had made very careful studies of the movements of enemy troops; our men engaged in the

operation had been well trained and we had maintained strict secrecy.

To make two attacks on the same railway section, to storm the enemy with great courage and wipe him out, to seize a large quantity of war material and gain rapid control over the terrain — these were exploits which showed the new progress of our armed forces in Binh Tri Thien in mobile warfare and annihilation attacks.

The military command of the sector sent a delegation to the cadres' National Congress held in Viet Bac on January 14, 1949. The Congress reviewed the situation and discussed future tasks of "*firmly maintaining the balance of forces and making preparations for the general offensive*", together with the relevant line of action and the measures needed to put it into effect. These conclusions gave great impetus to military activities all over the country.

In two weeks, beginning February 25, 1949, the Binh Tri Thien inhabitants and armed forces foiled a big mopping-up operation made by the French troops and puppet soldiers against the resistance base at Hoa My, killing over 200 men including a French colonel and two French captains.

In an armed propaganda incursion made on March 2, 1949, in broad daylight in Hue and the suburbs, we wiped out 30 mercenaries at Vi Da.

On March 30, we launched another raid against Dong Ha, killing 54 French and puppet soldiers.

We stepped up our activities in the countryside and around the towns and redoubled our attacks.

During this period (autumn-winter 1948 and beginning of 1949), guerilla warfare vigorously increased all over the country. The Party Committees at various levels were giving effective leadership to the military operations in their regions. The resistance bases were well defended, the leading organs were expanding. The prestige of the resistance rose and exerted a great influence on the masses.

As the regional forces increased in number and quality, the Ministry of Defence and the High Command decided to regroup many provincial regiments into infantry divisions, thus accelerating the move toward mobile warfare in the new stage of the war.

The resistance made progress in all fields. From the autumn-winter 1948 and beginning of 1949 campaign, the Binh Tri Thien armed forces and inhabitants were able to draw the following lessons :

1 — To rely on *the population*, the basis of the resistance. Political work among the masses is the foundation of the people's war in each region. It is essential to carry on the work of explanation, propaganda, education and mobilization among all sections of the population in order to give them a thorough understanding of the situation, and of the aims and guiding principles of the resistance.

2 — To fight *on all planes:* military, political, economic and cultural. While giving a strong impetus

to military activities (by wiping out the enemy forces, the puppets, traitors, and the reactionary administration), we must keep production going and protect crops, combat the enslaving culture and defend national culture.

3 — *To increase the forces of the resistance* by all means: develop production, promote an autarkic economy, combat natural calamities and the misdeeds of the enemy, consolidate people's power and the united Front, and develop the armed forces. Also to promote the growth of our forces through struggle on all planes.

4 — To make efforts to consolidate the *Party organizations* at all levels, to enable them to give absolute and comprehensive leadership in the war of resistance. On the basis of the concentrated and unified leadership of the Party committees, to promote democracy within the Party and the Front and towards the masses.

5 — *Persuasion work inside the puppet army* has acquired greater and greater strategic importance. It is necessary to stimulate it and encourage all the inhabitants, the various social strata, and families of puppet soldiers to engage in this work to fight against pressganging and to defend their own children against forced enlistment.

By practical actions, to show the people the difference between the people's army and the mercenary army.

6 — As *guerilla* warfare is the basis of the armed struggle it is necessary to execute the directive on

the formation of independent companies and battalion-size groups, to be imbued with the strategic importance of guerilla warfare and, on the basis of developed guerilla warfare, to wage mobile warfare and gradually raise its level.

V

From Winter-Spring 1949-1950 to Winter-Spring 1950-1951. Development of Rural Militia and Formation of Guerilla Units, Setting up of Regional Troops, Gradual Concentration of Regular Forces

1. What was the situation of the enemy ?

The war of aggression had lasted five years. The Chinese revolution was moving towards complete victory with the swift advance of its armed forces to southern China. The Soviet Union had put an end to US atomic monopoly. The French people were waging a more and more bitter struggle against the " dirty " war in Indochina. With France facing domestic difficulties, particularly in its economy and finances, the military budget had been curtailed and reinforcements for Indochina were running short. In the Indochinese theatre the enemy was curling up into his shell, hoping to cope with our growing forces by extending his system of bunkers and watch-towers.

At the beginning of 1949, in Binh Tri Thien, the enemy fell back, evacuating many positions : 16 posts around Thua Thien, 8 in Quang Tri and 5 in Quang Binh.

2. Our options

On the military plane we called for intensified activities in all theatres of operations by concerting our actions in Viet Nam with those of our comrades-in-arms in Laos and Cambodia in order to oblige the enemy to scatter his forces ; at the same time we should push forward with guerilla warfare behind the enemy's lines to pin him down, by coordinating attacks launched in front and in the rear. Towards mid-1949 a conference was held by representatives of the Party, the administration, the Front and the armed forces in the three provinces of Binh Tri Thien to review the situation and map out a plan of action according to the directives of the Party Central Committee.

The conference stressed the importance of the development of rural militia and guerilla units, together with the setting up of companies in districts and battalions in provinces. Abiding by the directives of higher levels, the regular units of the provinces and of the sector made active preparations to form a regular division, the Binh Tri Thien division, the first of its kind on such a tough front.

Thus, the *Binh Tri Thien division* saw the light, born of the population in that sector ; it was to coordinate its actions with those of other divisions operating all over the country with the aim of raising the level of battles of annihilation. That division was not a mere merging of regional regiments ; it marked a qualitative leap forward and showed the maturity of the armed struggle in that sector in every

field, with well-tempered and experienced cadres in command and soldiers who had perfected their technique and were better equipped, better armed, better organized and governed by better discipline.

The conference discussed the plan of campaigns to be waged in the sector so as to wipe out enemy forces, protect crops, improve our offensive position and coordinate local actions with operations in Bac Bo (North Viet Nam), the main theatre of operations, in the Sino - Vietnamese frontier area, in Nam Bo (South Viet Nam) and Trung Bo (Central Viet Nam).

3. Our military operations.

At the beginning of the Winter-Spring campaign, the armed forces and inhabitants of Thua Thien province commemorated the August Revolution and marked National Day (September 2) by organizing an ambush on August 17, 1949, at Uu Diem - My Chanh, in which an enemy company operating in the region was wiped out, the French major in charge of the operation was captured and 20 rifles, 1 mortar and one 12.7-mm machine gun, were seized.

On November 16, 1949, our troops launched the *first phase of Operation Le Lai* in Binh Tri Thien, spearheaded mainly on the districts of Trieu Phong and Hai Lang (Quang Tri province) to protect the crops. All the posts in these two districts were harassed and encircled, to prevent mopping-up raids and enable the inhabitants to bring in the harvest using small groups. Furthermore a surprise attack was

made against Bo Ben post (Trieu Phong district): the garrison, an auxiliary company, was wiped out.

The 2nd phase of *Operation Le Lai* started on December 15, 1949, in the southern part of Quang Binh. After some small ambushes, a big battle took place at Thach Xa Ha and Trang Diep against an enemy convoy and its reinforcements: a battalion of well-seasoned Afro-European troops was cut to pieces, a company wiped out, 7 military vehicles destroyed, Major Le Bruge and 2 lieutenants taken prisoner. The enemy reinforcements coming from Hoa Luat took about one hundred casualties and lost all their weapons.

That series of attacks testified to the accuracy of our foreknowledge of enemy troop movements, the realistic character of our plans, the flexibility of our command, the heroism of our soldiers and the high level of our battles of annihilation.

Operation Le Lai ended on December 25, 1949, with 9 enemy posts wiped out, 13 others evacuated, 1,700 enemy troops killed, 51 others taken prisoner, 190 rifles, 23 light-machine guns and 5 Lewis guns seized and with 5,000 sq. km, mostly in the southern part of Quang Binh province, liberated.

With the country-wide intensification of guerilla warfare, the enemy had become seriously threatened by the heavy, well-aimed blows of our regulars.

On January 27, 1950, we won another victory at Pho Trach - Luong Mai (Thua Thien) over two crack

battalions of Afro-Europeans, which suffered heavy losses: 130 dead, 150 wounded, and a lieutenant taken prisoner.

In summer 1950, Operation Phan Dinh Phung was launched, directed mainly against the southern part of Quang Binh province. That region offered many advantages with regard to terrain and supplies as it bordered on the free area composed of Thanh Hoa, Nghe An and Ha Tinh provinces, the direct rear-base of the Binh Tri Thien sector. The campaign was aimed partly at pinning down 8 crack Afro-European battalions to prevent them from intervening in Bac Bo, at protecting the harvest and, especially, at launching an offensive in the delta in order to extend the liberated area as far as the periphery of the towns.

Our operation started at the beginning of May 1950 with the destruction of 5 military vehicles at Trang Thiep and the seizure of all their arms.

Countering an enemy raid at Xuan Bo on May 20, we struck a hard blow against the 8th Afro-European Battalion. By a series of violent assaults and close fighting with hand grenades, light machine guns and bayonets, we killed over 200 enemy troops and wounded nearly 300 others. The corpses were strewn over the fields of ripe rice. That victory filled our combatants with enthusiasm.

After that success, we overran Sen Ha post and wiped out enemy reinforcements at Ha Co, Chap Le (Vinh Linh), destroying 40 vehicles and one aero-plane. This was a fairly important ambush on National Road No. 1.

To sum up, in that 2-month campaign in the three provinces we laid 94 ambushes, fought 12 open battles, 11 mine battles, and made 8 surprise attacks during which the enemy had 1,500 men killed, 650 wounded and 60 taken prisoner while 22 enemy troops surrendered. The campaign had attained its objectives. After this the military situation changed in our favour. The enemy was further pushed into the defensive, and slackened his pressure while the liberated areas had increased in size. In enemy-occupied regions, the situation had also improved. The inhabitants in the disputed zones enjoyed an easier life as mopping-up operations decreased.

Unfortunately, from the end of August to the end of September, the three provinces were devastated by big floods. Capitalizing on that calamity, the enemy mounted a rigorous economic blockade. Their looting of rice reserves caused many localities to suffer from famine. Faced with floods and enemy action, the regular forces had to scatter to cope with enemy raids and protect the population, their property and the paddy. Three hundred enemy troops were put out of action in two months.

Our situation improved in winter 1950 and spring 1951.

On October 24, 1950, a military train was ambushed at Luong Dien (Hai Lang district): 58 enemy soldiers were killed, 11 others taken prisoner, 2 light machine guns and one 20-mm gun seized. That action was carried out in coordination with Operation

Le Hong Phong which was just beginning along the Sino-Vietnamese frontier.

Early in 1951, the enemy resorted to new manœuvres. De Lattre de Tassigny, just arrived from France, advocated increasing the number of "mobile groups", pushing forward with "pacification" and enlisting mercenaries to "Vietnamize", to — "yellow" — the French expeditionary forces in order to offset the shortage of reinforcements from France.

He launched an offensive towards Hoa Binh along Road No. 6. After intensified pressganging, General Le Blanc brought his forces from 20,000 men in summer 1950 to 25,151 in January 1951, and organized 7 Afro-European battalions of intervention. Towards mid-1951, the 9th Tabor Battalion was brought in from Quang Nam, and the 2nd and 3rd Paratroop Battalions from Bac Bo in order to step up mopping-up operations in that sector.

For our part, we tried

— to launch large-scale counter-raids in order to wipe out important enemy forces ;

— to pin down the enemy so as to help other fronts, particularly in Bac Bo ;

— to establish communication lines from the delta to resistance bases through the enemy-occupied zone ;

— to launch, early in 1951, attacks by regular forces in coordination with regional forces.

The operation launched in spring 1951, code-named " On the impetus of victory" (*Day da chien thang*), was the baptism of fire of the Binh Tri Thien division fighting at the side of other armed forces in the sector.

On March 10, 1951, we attacked Pho Lai post in the north of Thua Thien in force. Many enemy troops were wiped out after a two hours' siege and mortar shelling ; hopeless, the survivors gave up. One company of French NCOs was put out of action together with a platoon of auxiliary troops, 20 prisoners were taken. We seized 100 carbines, 25 submachine guns, 6 light machine guns and 3 machine-guns. Not realizing that the post had been captured, the enemy sent in reinforcements which fell into an ambush and took about a hundred casualties including a captain of the puppet army.

Two days after, on March 13, two " mobile groups " commanded by Colonels Buttin and Sockel, marched on the plain of Phong Dien - Quang Dien in four columns in an attempt to effect a junction with Thanh Huong and to encircle our forces. The enemy was contained everywhere and had his two wings wiped out. In that mobile warfare battle in the region of Thanh Huong, My Xuyen and Uu Diem, the enemy had 900 men killed, including Colonel Buttin, 60 others captured, including 3 captains, and lost 150 carbines, 17 light machine-guns and 4 heavy machine guns. Operating on a front 35km long, our regular forces had shown their valour in mobile warfare as well as in assaults on strongholds.

On May 10, 1951, another sizable battle took place at My Chanh, Dien Khanh, in which two mobile groups

suffered heavy losses: 1,200 were killed or captured including the whole field command headed by a major, and over 200 firearms of various types fell in our hands. Our offensives increased in size and effectiveness.

On June 12, 1951, we overran Ba Doc position (Gio Linh district). A breach was made after an attack lasting three-quarters of an hour: the enemy was wiped out and our flag was hoisted on the roof of the CP building. The enemy lost 35 dead; 30 men were captured together with one 75-mm gun, one 82-mm mortar, 3 machine guns, 30 rifles and 30 submachine guns.

That victorious assault on a stronghold defended by a powerful artillery fire marked a big step forward for the armed forces in the Binh Tri Thien sector.

In another battle which took place on July 26, 1951, at Thanh Lam Bo (Phu Vang district), the enemy had 270 men killed, 35 others wounded and 69 captured, and lost 2 mortars, 5 machine guns, 15 submachine guns and 46 rifles.

In a word, during Operation "On the Impetus of Victory", our regular troops decimated seven-tenths of the enemy's crack mobile forces in Binh Tri Thien, and pinned the rest down, fighting in close coordination with the main front. Clear progress had been made in mobile warfare as well as in attacks on fortified points. For its part, guerilla warfare continued to gain momentum, and we won greater initiative in military operations.

* * *

Considering the whole perspective we may say that our resistance was growing in every respect. The principle of "developing rural militia and guerilla units, setting up regional forces and gradually concentrating the regular forces", together with the direction of the work of organization and the building of the armed forces in the sector, had yielded positive results. "To attach importance to guerilla warfare while pushing forward mobile warfare" was also a factor of victory.

The enemy was facing numerous dilemmas: concentration or dispersal of forces? occupation of ground or mobility? main front or secondary fronts? His crisis in manpower worsened. The morale of the French expeditionary forces and the puppet troops was dropping.

France was facing a difficult internal situation, chiefly in economics and finance. The war of aggression which had dragged on, was grinding to a standstill.

VI
The Growth of the Binh Tri Thien Front from 1952 to July 1954

1. Colonialist designs during that period

In the towns and countryside, round-ups of the youth were intensified in order to increase the army's numerical strength. Salan, commander-in-chief of the French expeditionary corps (FEC), described this as "Vietnamizing" the war and "yellowing the troops". Towards mid-1952, French and puppet troops in Binh-Tri-Thien reached a total of 31,459 men.

War material (ordnance, motor vehicles) considerably increased. So did US aid and the number of FEC planes.

The enemy pushed forward with the regroupment of the population and the creation of "white belts" around bases, towns and along lines of communication. They increased mopping-up operations, and made great efforts to set up a puppet rural administration and to destroy our bases. The war became still fiercer.

General Henri Navarre arrived from France in May with the plan bearing his name, which aimed at ending the war within 18 months by wiping out the "Viet Minh fighting forces". First Bac Bo was to be pacified and then Nam Bo, and in this way our resistance was to be crushed!

The plan was unrealistic and reckless, inspired by despair.

2. Our options

The 2nd Party Congress held in 1951, a political event of the first importance, had already confirmed the lines and leading principles of our resistance and stressed the unshakable will of our people to unite together so as to lead our resistance to victory.

Afterwards, the unification congress of the *Viet Minh - Lien Viet front* and the *Viet Nam - Cambodia - Laos Alliance Congress* strengthened the national unity and solidarity of the three Indochinese peoples and mobilized all the forces available for final victory.

In this situation, the leading organs and the military organs in Binh Tri Thien put forward the following military tasks for the period beginning mid-1952:

— To develop the three categories of armed forces throughout the sector;

— To strengthen the formation of cadres and fighters, push forward with the creation of artillery and support units, make the best use of new weapons and the military aid coming from the fraternal countries after the opening of the Chinese frontier;

— To carry out military operations in coordination with the main front;

— To strengthen political work and Party organization within the army, improve the work of the Party cells and committees to deal with military tasks;

— To pay particular attention to political work among enemy soldiers (including the Afro-Europeans), and especially the auxiliary troops.

3. Our activities

Early in 1952, after the Tet festival, the armed forces in Binh Tri Thien launched Operation *Nam Dong* in coordination with the Hoa Binh campaign in Bac Bo.

On March 17, Nam Dong post (Gio Linh district, Quang Tri province) was invested. The following morning, we ambushed enemy reinforcements on a two-kilometre-long section of Road 74. It was a fierce 4-hour attack on 80 vehicles full of troops with tank

protection. We set off a series of bombs and mines and launched attacks to split up the enemy's formations, wipe them out and destroy the motor vehicles. The victory was overwhelming. We killed 770 enemy troops, captured 3 machine-guns, 7 light machines guns, 18 sub machine guns and 58 rifles, and destroyed 15 armoured cars and vehicles. In the afternoon, Nam Dong was evacuated by the enemy. That important ambush, laid on a communication line according to the tactics of "investing a position in order to wipe out reinforcements" marked a further step forward in combat technique and command for our armed forces.

On May 31, we took Ba Don, the northernmost position in Quang Binh province, killed 250 Afro-Europeans, captured 48 others and seized 60 firearms. The enemy evacuated the position and the region was definitively liberated.

During the four months of Operation Nam Dong, and throughout the sub-sector, the three categories of armed forces were in full co-ordination for a vast offensive with different types of action: investment of posts, ambushes, attacks on communication lines, counter raids, harassments and battles of annihilation.

Their positions being shaken, the aggressors fell further and further back.

From 1953 onward, we were able whenever necessary to throw two or three battalions or a whole regiment into battle. In the political field, we were more conscious of the class character of our people's army.

At the beginning of the year, the Party and the Government set five major tasks for the nation:

— To mobilize the masses for reduction of land rents and interest rates; carry out land reform in some key sections;

— To carry out ideological rectification within the army to raise its combativeness and encourage it to wipe out ever greater numbers of enemy troops;

— To push forward with production, supply the front;

— To expand guerilla warfare, chiefly in the plains and behind the enemy's lines;

— To streamline the Party organizations and raise their capacity for leadership.

Following these directives, the Binh Tri Thien sector made an effort to increase guerilla warfare and to strengthen the regular units in readiness for the big battles to come. A large part of the Binh Tri Thien division was sent to the free zone (the three provinces of Thanh Hoa, Nghe An and Ha Tinh) to undergo intensive training, strengthen its organization and improve its armaments. It was to become a powerful unit with great mobility. Our next step was to turn the regular units into strike forces, which were to operate throughout the country.

In order to offset the temporary absence of part of the regular forces from Binh Tri Thien, the regional troops and guerilla units intensified their activities so much so that they not only prevented the

military situation from deteriorating but in fact improved and developed our position.

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Navarre's "18-month plan" gave a fairly important role to the Binh Tri Thien theatre of operations. Navarre wanted to take advantage of the absence of a large part of our regular forces from that sector to launch a series of mopping-up operations intended to wreck our preparations for an eventual offensive and at the same time to pressgang new mercenaries.

On March 13, 1953, countering a big enemy raid at Quang Dien, we wiped out a company of auxiliary troops at Xuan Tung, and took all their weapons. The 27th BTA Battalion, which had been sent in as reinforcements from Phu Oc on the same day, lost a company on March 14, including 46 men captured. New reinforcements committed bloody reprisals on the population but were routed on March 15 and 16 with heavy losses. In all, over 4 days, the enemy lost 1,200 men killed, 72 captured, and about one hundred firearms seized.

Taking advantage of the rains, in July the enemy mounted Operation *Camargue* against the districts of Trieu Phong, Hai Lang (Quang Tri) and Phong Dien (Thua Thien). It was the biggest mopping-up operation in that sector and lasted from July 26 to August 15, 1953, involving 15 battalions with 400 vehicles deployed in 4 columns pointing in different directions. We offered a stiff resistance and used very flexible

tactics by concentrating or dispersing our forces according to the requirements of the battle. This enabled us to harass the enemy while also waging battles of annihilation. Our counter-attacks were made chiefly by regional troops and guerillas and only two battalions of our regular forces were engaged.

When the operation was over, 450 enemy troops had been killed including a major. We had preserved most of our forces. The food reserves and belongings of the population had been well hidden so as to limit losses and damage. Over 200 dwellings burnt by the enemy were rapidly rebuilt thanks to a mutual-aid movement among the population.

In 1954, the Binh Tri Thien forces increased their pressure on the enemy, coordinating their actions with the *Northwest Campaign* and the battle of *Dien Bien Phu*.

From January 20 to February 20, we launched an operation called "One Month of Strong Pressure" directed mainly against Road No. 9 (Quang Tri province), destroying 19 bridges and 18 culverts from Dong Ha to Rao Quan (Huong Hoa district) overrunning Ta Lui, forcing the enemy to evacuate 5 other positions and liberating the whole district of Huong Hoa (west of Quang Tri).

We also made other attacks on the Hue - Da Nang road, destroying Nam O bridge, and laying an ambush against a convoy of vehicles and a train at Lang Co, killing many soldiers and a group of escorts. These attacks lasted up to May 1954.

In the plains, in a counter-raid in Trieu Quang, district of Trieu Phong, province of Quang Tri, we killed 120 enemy troops and took 34 prisoners.

On Mach 30, 1954, we wiped out the position of An Hoa, near Hue, killing 200 men and sowing confusion among the puppet troops and the puppet administration of the town. On April 28, in an attack against Uu Diem - Pho Trach, we took many positions and inflicted losses of 220 dead and 60 wounded on the enemy, destroying one 75-mm gun, one 105-mm gun and setting afire a petrol depot in the process.

All these battles in the delta were fought by our regional forces and guerilla units while the bulk of the Binh Tri Thien division was sent to other fronts. They contributed to the victory of the winter 1953-spring 1954 campaign in Indochina.

In an attack made on May 19 against a military train at Lang Co station, we overturned two locomotives, destroyed 19 carriages and inflicted 400 casualties on the enemy.

In the last big battle, given on June 18 to counter an enemy raid at Hai Lang, we took a toll of 350 enemy troops, dead and wounded, while effectively protecting our crops. From then on the enemy's forces were visibly exhausted, and they were obliged to fall back on their posts and blockhouses.

Up to the end of the hostilities, our military situation in the Binh Tri Thien sector was most satisfactory. The Dien Bien Phu victory had immediate repercussions and threw the enemy troops into

disarray. After the fall of the Dien Bien Phu entrenched camp, and the enemy's hurried withdrawal from Nam Dinh, Ninh Binh and the Bac Bo delta, the garrisons in the Binh Tri Thien sector lost all their energy and curled up into a defensive posture. By the time of the cease-fire and the regrouping of the two sides' forces as stipulated in the Geneva Agreements, our military potential in that sector had visibly increased : besides the Binh Tri Thien Division, we had a regiment of regular forces in Thua Thien, another one in Quang Tri, one or two companies in each district and from one platoon to one company of sufficiently armed guerillas in each village.

While carrying on the fight, our armed forces in the Binh Tri Thien sector had gradually completed their organization and build-up and had made a notable contribution to making the Viet Nam People's Army a powerful force to defend the socialist North and support the revolutionary struggle in the South.

VII
The Binh Tri Thien Lesson

During the nine years of struggle on the Binh Tri Thien front (from 1946 to 1954) our armed forces and population actively cooperated in the common victory of the nation :

1) They decimated or wiped out a large number of enemy troops composed of French and

Afro-European soldiers, legionaries and native mercenaries of all kinds;

2) They pinned down an important proportion of battle-seasoned enemy troops, thus giving effective support to our main front in the North of the country and to the battlefields in friendly countries (Laos and Cambodia).

3) They displayed extraordinary endurance in a hard battlefield, stimulating other fronts by their example.

4) After the dislocation of the Binh Tri Thien front in February 1947, the situation in this sector evolved from the restoration of our forces to their development following the slogan: In the course of the fighting let our strength grow while the enemy's declines.

5) The directives for the conduct of the people's war, which were very sound in the main, were executed in a creative way and yielded great successes in this sector.

These directives may be recalled as follows:

a) To wage a long resistance war by all the people, in all fields;

b) To consider guerilla warfare to be the essential form of struggle while gradually pushing ahead with mobile warfare. Not to under-estimate the importance of either guerilla warfare or large-scale battles all through the development of the armed struggle;

c) To set up independent companies and battalion-size groups;

d) To pay attention to small engagements as well as to medium-sized and large-scale battles, for together

they make up the effectiveness of the people's war in a given region. Not to limit action to small engagements. However, even when it is possible to wage big battles, one must attach the greatest importance to small and medium-sized battles. In the whole theatre of operations, guerilla war continues to have strategic importance.

e) No difficulty is insuperable when one is armed with firm determination, relies truly on the people and mobilizes them for the resistance. Binh Tri Thien is far from being favoured by nature: its land is barren, its population is thinly spread, its territory is narrow and can easily be cut up, and its economy is poor. And yet, the sector was able to overcome all difficulties and stand all trials. It did not give up in the face of bloody and continuous mopping-up operations, natural calamities (floods, typhoons) famine and economic blockade. It was the first area to popularize the famous rubber sandals made from the tyres of vehicles seized from the enemy.

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The tenacious resistance of Binh Tri Thien against US aggression can be seen as the natural development of this theatre of operations, which had witnessed the victory of the long resistance against the French colonialists and possesses great experience in armed and political struggle.

October 1972

The People's Offensive of Tet 1968 in Quang Tri — Thua Thien

TON VY

Military Situation at End of 1967 and Beginning of 1968

The American troops, driven into a corner, became more and more passive in the summer and autumn of 1967. No more large-scale operations were made to "search and destroy" the adversary. Even medium-sized and small operations were launched only to clear lines of communication and defend the threatened bases and towns. Throughout South Viet Nam the US was making a fundamenta. reorganization of its strategic dispositions so as to cope with three categories of the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF) — regular forces, regional forces and guerilla militia.

The US passivity was still more apparent in the First Tactical Area (1), especially in the Quang Tri - Thua Thien - Highway 9 theatre of operations. Here the

(1) Militarily, the Saigon administration divides South Viet Nam into four tactical areas.

American marines were suffering heavy losses (1) even though they remained dug in inside their bases. Pushing forward their advantage, the PLAF attacked the enemy unremittingly during winter 1967 and spring 1968. Thus in the small hours of October 3, 1967, at An Cuu, southeast of Hue, they overran the base of the 7th Armoured Regiment of the Saigon army; 500 mercenaries were killed and 40 tanks and armoured cars plus a dozen other military vehicles were destroyed.

Tet 1968: General Offensives and Uprisings in South Viet Nam

On orders from the NFL Central Committee Presidium, on the night of January 30 - 31, 1968, a general offensive was launched by the PLAF throughout South Viet Nam as a reply to the flagrant violations of the Tet truce.

That offensive came as a complete surprise to the Americans and their puppets, who were in the process of consolidating their defences and making preparations for a decisive confrontation by which they hoped to restore the situation in their favour.

AFP reported on January 31, 1968:

"Complete surprise, serious anxiety... this is the reaction of American high-ups at the news of the fierce

(2) According to a Reuter dispatch of September 17, 1967, the two Americans marine divisions had had 32,000 killed and wounded (20,000 since the beginning of 1967).

engagements which took place even in the heart of Saigon."

Reuter pointed out on January 31, 1968:

"The size and ferocity of the coordinated attacks in Saigon and other key centres in South Viet Nam took the US and its allies badly by surprise."

44 towns, about a hundred provincial and district capitals, and parts of the countryside under the control of the enemy were attacked by the PLAF. They also assaulted US field command posts, and the headquarters and command posts of army corps, divisions, brigades and regiments of the US, allied and Saigon armies, Saigon's military sectors and sub-sectors, airfields, ports, storehouses, bases, defence lines and roads

In six days, the enemy had 50,000 men put out of action or taken prisoner including 10,000 Americans. Whole units were wiped out: 3 armoured regiments, 29 battalions including 9 US and 1 Australian battalions; 1,500 planes and 4,000 military vehicles were destroyed. Many ammunition depots and fuel tanks were burnt.

The Capture of Hue

The Americans had turned the city into a real fortress and surrounded it with a strong defence belt. The official US-puppet administration of the First Tactical Area was in Hue, and many armoured and

infantry regiments plus two battalions of field police were stationed there.

In Phu Bai, a big American base lying 14km east and southeast of the city, on National Road N° 1, were located the HQs and CPs of the First Marine Division, the 5th marine regiment and a brigade of the 101st airborne division.

Besides an airfield and many artillery positions, it was defended by two or three battalions of the US mobile forces. The section of National Road from Phu Bai to Hue was carefully guarded on a round-the-c ock basis.

The Long Tho, Nam Giao, Tam Thai bases, the Nam Hoa district capital and many gun positions formed a defence line in the hilly region south of Hue.

National Road N° 1 to the west and northwest of the city was lined with numerous positions and strongpoints such as Tu Ha, Mom Xanh, An Lo, Dong Lam, the last defended by 4 American battalions.

The district capital of Huong Tra commanded the northern entrance to the city. Warships of the 7th Fleet and planes patrolled the Perfume River from Hue to the sea to safeguard supplies reaching the city by water.

On the night of January 30, 1968, with the assistance of the population, the PLAF guerillas, regional troops and regular units broke through all these protective belts and took Hue in a pincer movement.

At 12.45 a.m. on January 31, a fire broke out inside the citadel giving the signal for the assault.

Immediately, in the glare of searchlights, the PLAF attacked the enemy defence line, sweeping over it like a tidal wave, and cut to pieces the opposing forces. A few minutes later, the whole enemy garrison at the Mang Ca barracks (north of the citadel) had been wiped out. Calls for help came from the headquarters of the Saigon First Division and the executive offices of the administrative sector inside the citadel, but they were drowned by the besiegers' clamour.

With great secrecy a PLAF unit penetrated the base of the Saigon 7th Armoured Regiment and wiped it out. Up until dawn the local inhabitants, PLAF men and Saigon soldiers won to the revolutionary cause were harassing diehard enemy elements in Dong Ba and Gia Hoi quarters and occupied the broadcasting station and workshops. The Thuan Hoa hotel occupied by Americans was captured by the PLAF.

By 9:30 a.m. the PLAF and the population had become masters of the city. NFL flags, with a golden star on a red and blue field, floated over the government buildings and many dwelling houses. At 10 o'clock another big NFL flag was hoisted on top of the flag tower in the ancient imperial citadel. Hue was reliving the exhilarating atmosphere of the revolutionary days of August 1945.

All through the morning of January 31, the inhabitants of Hue and the suburbs held big street demonstrations demanding the repatriation of US troops and showing their determination to maintain power.

Two Saigon units sent as reinforcement rallied to the popular movement in protest against the war and disbanded. Many soldiers of another unit, surrounded on Bach Ho bridge, took to flight or crossed over to the side of the population with their weapons.

These were hard blows on the military and political front and the US and Saigon commands were thrown into confusion.

In that city swarming with GIs — marines and foot soldiers of the "air cavalry" — it was not until the afternoon of January 31 that three Saigon battalions with armour support were sent to the rescue of the beleaguered troops. They were intercepted by the inhabitants and PLAF men who resorted to persuasion as well as force. About a hundred diehards were killed, 4 M.113 armoured cars destroyed and some helicopters downed. The survivors ran away or rallied to the people's cause bringing their arms with them.

Meanwhile, south of the city, the US and Saigon commands mustered the remains of their battered units, trying to recapture the An Cuu police sector, but they were repelled by the PLAF and the inhabitants who had been able to arm themselves from the captured armouries.

During the night of January 31, citizens armed with spears and clubs went around the city searching out enemy torturers.

On February 1, the population and armed forces continued their attacks on the government offices in

the south of the city. After an hour's fighting they gained control of the residence of the head of Thua Thien province and Nga Sau road junction, and also Tu Dam pagoda and Dong Khanh avenue. They took prisoner about a hundred agents well known for their cruelty, including high-ranking army officers and government officials, and called on the Saigon soldiers to surrender.

On the morning of February 1, the marines tried to clear the road to Hue and rescue their HQ, but the section of National Road Nº 1 from Da Nang to Hue had been cut by the revolutionary forces who had also captured the Phu Loc military sector on that road.

After the American and Saigon troops had received reinforcements they attempted to retake Hue. Six times they reached the city gates but each time they were repulsed with heavy losses.

The US-puppet command then launched air attacks against the populous quarters of the city. To defend the population, PLAF men concentrated their fire and downed several aircraft at a time. In a daring attack on the US airfield, they destroyed 15 helicopters and reconnaissance planes and took the airbase. All air communication between Hue and the outside world was thus cut off.

Meanwhile, the revolutionary forces captured the Treasury of Thua Thien, destroyed Thua Phu prison and released 2,500 of our fellow-countrymen detained there. Meanwhile, inside the prison,

the political prisoners, aided by some patriotic soldiers in the Saigon army, had risen up, stormed the prison gates and punished the torturers with weapons taken from them. Side by side with the PLAF men, they went on hunting the enemy in other parts of the city.

Meanwhile, PLAF guns were pounding US and Saigon bases in the Phu Bai sector and the Phu Loc and Quang Dien military sub-sectors, preventing them from rescuing the troops besieged inside the city.

On February 1, the Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace Forces in Thua Thien - Hue region was set up. It put out an appeal to the population urging them to fight relentlessly against the Americans and defend the city. Most of the students and a number of Buddhists took the side of the revolutionary forces.

The Battle for Hue: Momentous Days

General Abrams, deputy commander-in-chief of the US expeditionary forces, arrived at Phu Bai on February 4.

There, better than in Saigon, he began to realize just how critical the situation was for the US and Saigon forces in that sector. The big American base was a great heap of debris from the planes and armoured cars and many dead bodies of American service-men lay waiting evacuation.

In Hue, with a series of very violent attacks, the PLAF smashed the whole apparatus of war and repression set up by the US and its puppets and gave effective support to the uprisings of the town population. The popular uprisings, in their turn, helped the development of the NFL's military activities. The Liberation armed forces and the population were in control of the city, a rear base of the American troops and the Saigon First Army Corps in Central Viet Nam.

They started successfully to launch a series of even fiercer attacks.

On February 4 US air forces and artillery pounded the city, dropping hundreds of tons of bombs and shells, and toxic chemicals. Then the enemy command threw in two Saigon paratroop battalions to attack the citadel.

The PLAF held the citadel walls from Dong Ba gate to the flagtower. In one day, they routed four enemy counter-attacks, putting 200 mercenaries out of action and burning four tanks. A small PLAF unit defending Dong Ba gate foiled the enemy assaults coming from all directions despite an avalanche of ordnance amounting to dozens of tons.

On the following days, while pinning down the paratroops, the PLAF made a counter-attack against the columns of reinforcements massing around the city.

They cut off the enemy supply route. By surprise attacks, they destroyed arms and ammunition depots. A river convoy sailing up from the Thuan An estuary

was intercepted and 7 ships were sunk or damaged. Inside Hue itself, the enemy was running short of food and ammunition. Meanwhile the continuous pounding aimed at Phu Bai by the PLAF artillery was paralysing it completely.

In ten days (from February 1 to 10, 1968), the PLAF and the population of Hue maintained their positions and put out of action 1,500 Saigon paratroops; the remnants fell back to Mang Ca, north of the city.

The population, including old people, women and teen-agers supplied the PLAF with food and evacuated the wounded. Under bombs and shells, old people and young girls sailed their sampans up and down the Perfume River carrying combatants, porters, ammunition and foodstuffs.

It was not until one week after the PLAF general offensive against Hue started that American troops were able to reach the city gates, after losing 20% of their forces in successive engagements in the periphery of the city.

The enemy realized that, at each step he took, he was hard pressed by the PLAF and the local people. Evacuation of the wounded by road was very dangerous. And now, around the city, he had become ensnared in a war without a frontline — a kind of war he knew well from fighting in the mountains and rural areas.

" Today we are pinned down and at a standstill, " their war bulletins would say. " Today we only moved ten metres forward. " " It's impossible to defend ourselves as there is no definite frontline. " " The enemy

is everywhere, we are exposed on every side. " One day, a piece of news came to Abrams like a bolt from the blue: A column of tanks and armoured cars, advancing on the city, had opened a breach in the defences without meeting too much opposition. Not a single anti-tank shell had been fired. No obstacle had been put in the way of the American soldiers following behind. All of a sudden, from all directions, PLAF men rushed on the tanks, captured them and immediately turned their guns on the American infantrymen.

Lieutenant-colonel Thompson was at a loss where to set up his field CP which would receive a shower of mortar shells wherever it was installed. The tanks sent on reconnaissance were threatened by shells, which exploded only thirty or forty metres from the CP. Four American scouts who had just turned a street corner were killed in a yard by bullets fired from nobody knew where. Of the six GIs who came to take their bodies away, five met the same fate. The survivor, not yet recovered from his surprise, was hit by a bullet. He saved his life by pretending to be dead.

The people were turning every street corner into a small fortress and each wall into a rampart. Abrams, who had expected to have an easy job crushing a few PLAF battalions, found himself facing a whole city of 140,000 inhabitants.

On the night of February 11, PLAF artillery pounded Phu Bai and Dong Lam, the starting points and

logistic bases of the American troops attacking Hue. Storehouses and aircraft were destroyed. The US marines were in difficulty right from the start.

On February 11 and 12, two battalions of Saigon marines and two American companies penetrated Mang Ca after passing though innumerable difficulties. But the enemy attempt to muster a big force to make a counter-attack on the city failed.

After receiving reinforcements of American mobile reserves, the enemy launched repeated counter-attacks against the gates of the citadel. But to no avail.

On February 14, covered by a dozen tanks, the US-Saigon forces attacked in five waves to try to storm the northern part of the citadel.

While containing them on the main front, the PLAF made five sallies in the northeast and northwest of the city. In coordination with the self-defence militia of the different city quarters, they took the enemy from the rear. Every dwelling-house and every street corner concealed snipers who harassed enemy forces from 6 in the morning to 5 in the evening: two Saigon marine companies and one US marine company were cut to pieces and 5 M.113s, 2 helicopters and 10 machine gun nests destroyed.

On February 15, the enemy changed their tactics: swarming from all directions, four mixed US-Saigon battalions supported by 20 tanks and armoured cars made a concerted attack against the Chanh Tay, Cua Huu, Thuong Tu and Dong Ba gates. The main assault was made against Dong Ba by 2 battalions and 8 tanks and armoured cars.

65 sorties were flown by jet planes, B. 57 bombers and planes belonging to the 7th Fleet to provide cover for the ground troops.

All these attacks were repelled. A particularly fierce, hand-to-hand struggle which lasted from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. was fought around Dong Ba gate in which our fighters used rifle-butts, bayonets, and stratagems. The PLAF wiped out 400 enemy troops and 6 M 113s and downed 5 warplanes. They also attacked the enemy in Tay Loc airfield and the army workshop at Mang Ca and managed to gain control of the Cuong De and Thai Phien crossroads, the sanitary centre and hospital, the northwest of Tay Loc airfield and Tran Quoc Toan street.

From February 16 to 20, all counter-attacks made by the enemy were repulsed with losses.

Simultaneously with the storming of the city and its suburbs, the PLAF had attacked a series of enemy bases at Nam Giao, Long Tho, Tam Thai, Dap Da, Phac Lac, Vi Da,... etc... and such bridges as Cau Van, Ben Ngu, Lo Ren, An Cuu. In particular, they had put out of action 300 men from four battalions of the US First Air Mobile Division and one Saigon paratroop battalion in the sectors of Bon Tri, Bon Pho, Que Chu, La Chu. They had prevented these battalions from joining the bulk of the enemy forces storming the citadel.

From February 21 onwards, the enemy changed their tactics again. They started to use small units only, who would spring surprise attacks to try and

wear down the PLAF. At the same time they used their artillery as much as possible. The 39th and 21st battalions of the Special Forces were rushed in from Da Nang to reinforce the eastern sector of Hue.

On February 22, a US marine battalion supported by aviation, artillery and armour left An Cuu for Phu Xuan with the mission of protecting American war vessels going up the Perfume River to rescue the GIs beleaguered in Hue. Suddenly a burst of gunfire mowed them down. The enemy fired at the surrounding buildings while enemy planes coming to the rescue bombarded the area at random without succeeding in stopping the fusillade. The enemy spotted a machine gun nest, and threw their armoured vehicles into action against it. The machine-gun fire stopped. The marines rushed on hoping for a breakthrough. But three explosions set on fire three M.113s while the GIs found themselves once more mown down by PLAF machine guns, rifles and hand grenades. 120 US marines were put out of action. In fact they had been cut down not by a "Viet Cong battalion" but by eleven young militia girls fighting from a network of shelters and communication trenches together with three PLAF men.

In an article published on February 16, a UPI correspondent gave a fairly accurate appreciation of the stalemate of the American battalions: According to military information, the adversary had only intended to stay in Hue for seven days at most. But today is the 17th day and his flag is still seen floating over the city. The American and Saigon forces form a solid

line from the east to the west of the citadel with US marine battalions on the left, Saigon troops in the centre and two US marine battalions on the right. The allied forces are at least four times more numerous than their adversaries. But it is the latter who hold the initiative.

And the reporter wondered how the PLAF were able to hold out under such fierce bombings!

An American colonel commanding the operations complained that the US marines had never before gone through such a hard trial. Despite the use of sophisticated weapons and even toxic gases, they found themselves unable to move forward. Whenever they captured a house or a street corner, at the price of heavy casualties, they would find themselves attacked from the rear.

Abrams had promised to "wipe out the Viet Cong" in a few days. But the recapture of the city promised to be a very costly operation.

Nevertheless a sensational event occurred on February 25. The NFL flag no longer fluttered on top of the flag tower. In the citadel, the gunfire grew sporadic, and then could be heard no more.

The American troops, wavering at first, rushed into the citadel.

The PLAF had withdrawn from the city according to plan.

In one month, they and the citizens of Hue had shattered the puppet administration and replaced it by revolutionary power.

They repelled about a hundred counter-attacks and inflicted heavy losses on the enemy: 20,000 men were put out of action (including over 5,000 GIs), 1,770 others were captured, 5,000 others took to flight; among the units wiped out were one armoured regiment, 9 battalions (2 infantry, 2 field police, 1 of commandos, 1 of *bao an* guards, 1 supply battalion and 2 of sappers), 20 companies (including 4 American and 1 South Korean) and 50 platoons.

The Saigon First Infantry Division was cut to pieces; a M.G. composed of 3 paratroop battalions was put out of action and 3 Saigon marine battalions decimated. Three US marine battalions, 3 battalions of the First Air Mobile Division, 1 armoured regiment, 1 US airborne battalion were also badly mauled.

The PLAF and the local people wiped out 39 enemy positions and heavily damaged 11 others, destroyed 562 military vehicles, tanks and armoured cars and 15 artillery pieces, downed or destroyed on the ground 212 planes, sank or damaged 41 war vessels and motor launches, blew up 14 bridges, and captured a dozen ammunition dumps and food stores.

In three weeks of fighting, the American bombardment had destroyed 80 percent of the old royal city, and a number of its historical monuments. The sight of this ruined city reminded foreign observers of the European cities razed by the Nazis in World War II.

On February 16, an American officer had given a warning: "If this goes on at the same tempo, these ruins will soon be reduced to dust." (AFP, February 16, 1968).

Under the headline: "A murdered city," *Le Monde* painted a picture of the devastation:

"If Viet Nam needs a symbol, she now has one: Hue. Hue will remain the Guernica of Viet Nam.

"Today, all the trees have been truncated, cut to pieces, or mangled by bombs; there is not a coconut palm, guava, mango or pomegranate tree still left standing. All the public benches are broken, all the electric poles are twisted, all the houses are destroyed or damaged. According to official statistics, on the left bank of the Perfume River 100% of the dwelling houses have been hit and 65% destroyed; on the right bank 85% have been hit, and 50% destroyed. In all, out of the 20,000 houses in the city, 18,000 have been damaged or destroyed." (*Le Monde*, April 13, 1968).

In Thua Thien and Quang Tri, the two Northernmost Provinces, the War Continued

At the same time as the battles for Hue were unfolding the PLAF was striking at the enemy posts on National Road No. 1 between Phu Loc (Thua Thien) and Quang Tri; many of them were wiped out, others were evacuated by the enemy.

About a hundred mopping-up operations were intercepted by our forces with the help of the local population in the districts of Trieu Phong and Hai Lang (Quang Tri province) and in the districts of Quang

Dien, Phu Vang and Huong Thuy (Thua Thien province). Within three months (March to May 1968) 2,000 GIs, mostly of the First Air Mobile Division, had been put out of action, only considering the north of Hue.

The lines of communication were also one of the PLAF's targets: sometimes the road section from Da Nang to Phu Loc was cut for seven days running. Thirty military vehicles were destroyed in one week on the road from My Thuy to Hai Lang. Ten war vessels were sunk or set on fire on June 6 and 7, 1968, at the Thuan An estuary in Hue.

Between April and August, 1968, the enemy deployed 20 battalions of the US First Air Mobile Division, the 101st Airborne Division and Saigon paratroop units to build a defence line at the foot of the mountains in the districts of Hai Lang, Phong Dien, Huong Tra and Huong Thuy.

Coordinating their actions with the regional forces and guerilla formations, the PLAF intercepted and harassed the enemy columns and destroyed their camps: thus the CPs of the Third Regiment and two companies on Hill 416, Phong Dien district, were wiped out on July 2, 1968.

The PLAF prevented the enemy from bringing in supplies by air and 50 planes were shot down.

From mid-April to early August 1968, the Americans launched two sizeable operations against A So and A Luoi, a region which has been liberated long before and was situated in the hilly region of Thua Thien, southwest of Hue.

But they were routed with heavy losses: 5,000 casualties, 240 planes and 50 heavy guns destroyed. The First Air Mobile Division lost 35 helicopters and 500 men on April 19 alone. This was one of the most tragic days for that crack division.

Meanwhile, the PLAF attacked the enemy unremittingly in urban centres and the countryside. By liquidating hundreds of the cruel thugs who fought in the Saigon army and administration, they created an atmosphere of permanent insecurity in the towns and cities under the enemy control.

Many enemy bases were stormed: Phu Bai, Dong Ha, Tu Ha, Dong Lam, La Vang, Ai Tu, the HQ of the 101st Airborne Division, the American logistic base north of Lang Co, etc. Some of them were taken and retaken seven or eight times such as Dong Lam, La Vang, Ai Tu. For instance, on May 19, PLAF guns pounded Dong Lam, destroying 150 helicopters. On May 20, heavy attacks were made by the PLAF on the field CP of the US armoured units at Dong Toa, the HQ of the US 101st Airborne Division and against Phu Bai. At the CP of the US armoured units, 1,950 men (about one hundred officers) were put out of action, 26 artillery pieces, 100 military vehicles, 12 aircraft and a dozen storehouses were destroyed.

We may recall that in an ambush laid on April 30, PLAF men had wiped out a US armoured group on Cau Nhung bridge (Quang Tri province) with 45 tanks destroyed and 300 enemy troops put out of action. On May 6, they wiped out the American logistic base north of Lang Co, destroying 80 military vehicles,

seven 105-mm guns and 11 fuel tanks, and inflicting 250 casualties on the enemy. In August and September 1968 they dealt more stunning blows at their adversary: in three assaults made on August 16, 17 and 29 against Tan Dien, Mui Ne and Vi Gia Thuong, they annihilated one US battalion and 5 companies totalling over 2,000 men and wrecked 21 heavy guns; on September 8, they pounded Dong Lam base, destroying 35 airplanes and 50 vehicles.

Fighting in close coordination with the regular forces, in the first nine months of 1968, the regional units and guerillas put out of action tens of thousands of enemy soldiers including two American major-generals, and downed 162 aircraft.

Everywhere the population was waging an active political struggle: south of Quang Tri, they foiled important mopping-up operations with their bare hands and pinned down American armoured columns.

Thus *in 9 months of general offensives and uprisings, the PLAF and inhabitants of Quang Tri - Thua - Thien Hue* caused enemy losses of 80,000 men: 36,000 of these were casualties, 10,000 had deserted the Saigon army ranks or taken to flight, and the rest had been taken prisoner. Among the POWs were one American colonel and several American and Saigon field officers. Two American generals had been killed by the guerillas.

PLAF men wiped out one Saigon armoured regiment, 13 battalions and 50 companies (including 2 battalions and 17 companies of the US expeditionary forces), and 30 US and Saigon platoons; 196 platoons of guards (*bao an*) and militia (*dan ve*) and 20 "pacification" brigades were disbanded. An American motorized regiment, 3 Saigon infantry regiments, a column of Saigon paratroops, and a dozen American and Saigon battalions took heavy casualties.

The PLAF had shot down or destroyed on the ground 1,000 aircraft of various types, wrecked over 2,000 military vehicles (including 600 tanks and armoured vehicles), sunk or set on fire 83 war vessels and motor launches, destroyed 201 pieces of heavy artillery, 1,128 tents and 1,605 sections of pipe-line, and burnt 46 ammunition dumps and tanks containing around 3,500 tons of ammunition and fuel. They captured 8 tanks and self-propelled guns and 13 stores of weapons and ammunition containing nearly 6,000 arms of various kinds.

They destroyed or forced the evacuation of 45 enemy bases and positions and 12 military posts, and shattered the puppet military and administrative apparatus from provincial to village level, liberating almost all the rural areas, inhabited by about 400,000 people.

Highway 9 and the Khe Sanh Battle

The US defence line along Highway 9 stretched for 90 kilometres from Cua Viet port to the Lao frontier.

From National Road No.1 to the west of Con Tien and Cam Lo, the ground is rather flat and from

Cam Lo to the Lao frontier it is hilly and covered with jungle. The Americans built a whole defence system with several groups of strong points such as Khe Sanh, Tan Lam, Ca Lu, Cam Lo, Con Thien, Dong Ha, Cua Viet. Other strong points were also set up to the north of the road : Doc Mieu, Con Tien, Gio Linh.

The Khe Sanh base was built towards the end of 1967. After the capture of Lang Vay by the PLAF in summer-autumn 1967, the Americans brought in about 10,000 men. They turned the region into a vast system of strong points so as to gain control of the hilly region west of Quang Tri and parry probable attacks of the PLAF against the four northernmost provinces of South Viet Nam.

The Khe Sanh defence system was composed of three groups of solidly-built strong points : Ta Con, Huong Hoa and Lang Vay.

The Ta Con group, built in a valley 2 km long by 1 km wide, contained a thick network of fortified positions, depots, barracks and an airfield. It was defended by a reinforced American regiment (the 26th Regiment of the 5th Marine Division, about 6,000 men), under the 3rd Marine Division in charge of the defence of Highway 9. The hills around the hollow were occupied by companies or battalions. Strongholds were set up on top of the most important hills : 471, 689... provided with bunkers, underground shelters, and bristling with obstacles.

The base of Lang Vay was an outpost protecting the access to Ta Con, 8 km to the southwest and

garrisoned by 1,000 men, mostly from the Saigon Special Forces.

The Huong Hoa military sub-sector, 8 km southeast of Ta Con and 5 km east of Lang Vay, was defended by 3 Saigon companies under direct American command.

The whole defence system at Khe Sanh was afforded powerful cover by artillery and aircraft, including B-52 super-bombers.

In coordination with their activities on other battlefields in South Viet Nam, the PLAF opened their offensive against Khe Sanh on the night of January 21, 1968, by springing a powerful attack which rapidly wiped out the enemy strong points in the district capital of Huong Hoa. From there, they threatened Lang Vay and Ta Con.

On January 25, General Westmoreland made a short visit to Ta Con to raise the morale of the garrison and affirm the Pentagon's determination to hold Khe Sanh at any price. The same day, he gave orders to the First Air Mobile Division to move to Phu Bai and Quang Tri town as a mobile reserve. He established an airlift for the eventual supply of Khe Sanh and sent in heavy artillery pieces to increase the fire power of that base. The defence of Lang Vay and Ta Con was strengthened. By January 27 the First Cavalry Division was already installed at Phu Bai and Dong Lam. Orders were given to American aircraft to give maximum support to Khe Sanh. By January 29, there were 50,000 American GIs

operating along the Highway 9 defence line to guard Khe Sanh.

Despite the PLAF general offensive of January 30, 1968, Westmoreland maintained in place the mobile reserves for Khe Sanh. Every day, jet planes and B-52s made hundreds of sorties, dumping thousands of tons of bombs around Khe Sanh.

On the night of February 6, in a violent attack using different means in coordination, the PLAF overran Lang Vay. Nearly one thousand mercenaries of the Saigon Special Forces with their American commanders were put out of action or taken prisoner. There were tens of thousands of GIs from the mobile reserves on the defence line along Highway 9 but they were unable to intervene. The loss of that group of strong points was a bad shock for the US command in Saigon. One American general exclaimed: "The loss of Lang Vay is a great cause for despair." (AP, February 8, 1968)

After destroying the defensive works southeast and southwest of Khe Sanh and preventing the various groups of the enemy's defence system from rescuing each other, the PLAF invested Ta Con.

It was the beginning of a long, murderous siege which made Khe Sanh a "hell" for the 6,000 men entrenched there and threw the Pentagon and the White House into confusion. Johnson feared a new Dien Bien Phu and at a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff compelled his generals to sign a declaration pledging not to let that entrenched camp fall.

Flying 200 sorties per day on the average, that is nearly half the number of air sorties in all theatres of operations in South Viet Nam, the US air force poured an unprecedented quantity of explosives on the mountains of Khe Sanh. According to western news agencies, this was the most murderous bombardment in the history of war. But it was of no use. Using various forms of attack, and coordinating various arms, chiefly artillery, and tactics (investment, encroachment, coup de main and skillfully-laid ambush), the PLAF tightened their noose around Khe Sanh. Meanwhile, they threatened and hit at the logistic bases of Dong Ha and Cua Viet.

According to the western press the siege of Khe Sanh had three dimensions: in the air, on the ground and underground.

By the end of March, after 70 days of investment, Khe Sanh was in dire straits. The New York Times admitted that the steel pledge taken by the Joint Chiefs of Staff began to crumble. Between January 21 and March 31, 1968, the PLAF wiped out 4,900 enemy troops (3,300 of them American), captured 217 Saigon and American soldiers, disbanded 700 Saigon mercenaries, downed or destroyed on the ground 208 planes of various types, wrecked or damaged 40 arms and ammunition dumps, 31 heavy guns and mortars and 21 vehicles, destroyed 105 blockhouses and artillery pieces, and captured 200 firearms of various kinds and great quantities of military equipment.

In an attempt to relieve Khe Sanh, General Abrams launched on April 3, 1968, a great operation,

"Pegasus", with 30,000 men of the US First Air Mobile Division and the Saigon Third Paratroop Brigade together with the marines on the defence line along Highway 9.

The enemy forces advanced in three spearheads: some units were parachuted on the villages of Cat, Khoai and Huc Thuong about 18 km from Khe Sanh; other columns started from Ca Lu and Tan Lam in the direction of Khe Sanh, along Highway 9; later other troops were parachuted north of Khe Sanh. According to *AFP*, the First Cavalry, which formed the mobile reserve, brought along prefabricated blockhouses in its helicopters for its men to dig in if need be.

All these columns were intercepted. The GIs of the First Cavalry were pinned down in the villages of Cat, Khoai, Huc Thuong and Huc Ha. The marines found themselves unable to advance along Highway 9 and had to call in two battalions of the First Cavalry as reinforcements. The Saigon mercenaries, landing north of Khe Sanh, suffered heavy casualties.

In three days, from April 3 to 5, the enemy lost over a thousand men, mostly Americans. On April 6 and 7, the reinforcements fell into traps prepared by the PLAF at Lang Con, Thuong Van, Hill 595, Lang Vay... and lost another thousand men.

Meanwhile, the PLAF launched a new wave of attacks in the coastal plains of Quang Tri and Thua Thien and along Road 12 (Hue, A So, A Luoi) and on the support bases for Operation Pegasus such as Dong Ha, Cua Viet, My Thuy, Dong Lam.

The supply routes of enemy reinforcements were threatened. The US Command was obliged to shift the First Cavalry stationed in that sector to the defence of Road 12. Besides heavy casualties, that division lost more than three-quarters of its helicopters. The 101st Airborne Division was also badly cut up. At Khe Sanh, the situation of the enemy grew worse.

After May 1968, the PLAF increased their pressure around Khe Sanh, blocking all enemy attempts at disengagement.

Early in June 1968 the US Command dispatched the 4th Marine Regiment from Da Nang to Highway 9. The marines were dropped 16 km east of Khe Sanh, in the region of Pa Trang, Huc Coc Giang and Huc Coc Thuong so as to threaten the PLAF rear base and enable the Ta Con garrison to evacuate. But the PLAF had foreseen this manoeuvre and, supported by the local population, it immediately intercepted the enemy troops, putting out of action about one thousand men. In particular, over two days (June 15 and 18) the 3rd Marine Battalion was decimated at Phu Nhoi, 16 km southeast of Ta Con. Ta Con was still surrounded.

At last, the enemy evacuated Khe Sanh at the end of June and beginning of July, hard pressed by the PLAF. *UPI* wrote on July 6 that the Communists were creating difficulties for the American troops till the last day. On July 9, a communiqué released by the US Command in Saigon announced that its men had completed the evacuation of Khe Sanh.

Between June 26 and July 9, 1968, while the enemy was evacuating his troops, the PLAF put out of action 2,000 men, shot down 30 planes and destroyed 40 military vehicles of various kinds.

From the failure of Operation Pegasus until July 9, capitalizing on the confusion of the enemy troops, the PLAF inflicted casualties equal to half of the total enemy losses on the Khe Sanh front: 7,000 dead and wounded, 122 planes downed, 69 military vehicles and many arms depots destroyed. They captured an important quantity of weapons and war material including 2 helicopters.

For the US Command, the loss of Khe Sanh was of great strategic significance. Ever since the PLAF's general offensive, launched in spring 1968, it had nursed the hope of being able to parry the PLAF blows in the towns while maintaining its positions in the rural and hilly regions. While 100 American and Saigon battalions defended Saigon and Hue, over 100,000 men had been sent to the Hue sector to defend Highway 9. Priority had been given to the defence of Khe Sanh. The main task of the strategic mobile forces (the First Air Cavalry, the US 101st Airborne Division, the Saigon Paratroop Regiment) had been to rescue Khe Sanh.

The abandonment of that base testified to the failure of that strategy. With the fall of Khe Sanh, one section of the strategic defence line on Highway 9 had been dismantled, laying bare a series of important bases in the First Tactical Area. The PLAF increased their pressure and the military situation of the enemy grew

from bad to worse. The loss of Khe Sanh was a new fiasco, and marked the failure of US defensive strategy.

The most typical and most up-to-date tactics used by the US expeditionary forces had proved to be ineffective. To these the PLAF opposed their own methods of fighting and on the battlefield they kept the initiative.

It was also a political failure for Johnson, Westmoreland and Abrams, who had made it a point of honour to defend that base.

The general offensives and uprisings of the armed forces and inhabitants of Quang Tri-Thua Thien-Hue, and, above all, the battle for Hue, one of the longest and fiercest battles waged against the Americans in Viet Nam, were followed with great admiration and sympathy by the whole Vietnamese nation and progressive people the world over.

These offensives and uprisings made a decisive contribution to the success of the PLAF general offensive in spring 1968, an important turning-point of the resistance in South Viet Nam.

As early as February 21 *AFP* cabled from Saigon: "The American concept of absolute mobility, which was to be created south of the demilitarized zone as a way of relieving Khe Sanh, is over. The mobile units (the 101st Airborne Division or the brigades of the First Air Mobile Division) are now used for interception around the towns being stormed by the Viet Cong: Quang Tri and Hue...

"Never has the North Vietnamese Command (read the PLAF) had such a freedom of action, such an absolute strategic initiative. It was so formerly, when the battle took place in the ricefields, mountains and jungle. Now it holds a trump one hundred times superior: for the first time the big towns are involved. The South Viet Nam government and the Americans must protect them at any cost and for this, give up everything else."

In a more exhaustive balance sheet, *AFP* drew a further conclusion: "On February 24, the Viet Cong flag will be lowered in Hue... It (the NFL) has succeeded in pinning down the US forces in defensive positions and sweeping away the pacification program in a good third of the country... Above all it has given proof of its combativeness and determination. The psychological effect on the population is considerable."

The Path of a Patriotic Intellectual*

Hue – Paris – Saigon (1953-1965)

Born into a wealthy bourgeois family, I have only retained, from my boyhood, vague impressions of certain images, colours and sounds of the August Revolution in Hue - Thua Thien: a sea of red flags, the glittering golden star over demonstrating crowds of both sexes and all ages. I remember, with deep emotion, the little pioneer I was then, marching joyfully in time to the drum.

Then the war broke out. My family moved out of the city to Phu Vang, then Chuong village (An Truyen) where I was delighted to fool around, fishing, hunting for butterflies, picking flowers, playing more than studying, and living would have been heavenly had not it been for the fear of frequent round-ups and raids by French troops.

* Excerpts from the reminiscences of Prof. Le Van Hao. The title is ours. (*Ed.*)

Back to Hue, I spent most of my time in the missionary schools *Pellerin* and *La Providence*. For six years in succession the Catholic priests initiated me in prayers and masses and a curriculum strictly patterned after that of the "Great French Metropolitan Country" spiced with a few hours of Vietnamese purely for form's sake. And during or outside class-time, these black-gowned ascetics did not forget to inculcate into my innocent mind bitter anti-communist dogmas. Understandably enough, they would not let any opportunity pass to laud the metropolitan country to the skies (nobody then thought Dien Bien Phu possible a few years later). It is with bitterness that I remember those days: I, a Vietnamese, had very vague and inadequate notions of my own land's tongue, literature and history.

To dodge compulsory military service of the Bao Dai regime, at the age of 17, I was sent by my parents to France to continue secondary education. After graduation, I was frankly happy to enter the Faculty of Letters of the Paris University (Sorbonne) in 1955. Thirsty for knowledge, I plunged into studies, eager to suck in everything: French language and literature, world contemporary and modern history, American history and culture, history of arts, history of religions, drifting aimlessly in the sea of that "general culture" in which the Europeans take great pride. I was myself seized by this alien pride without being aware of the danger of estrangement from the national traditions which threatens every Vietnamese youth studying abroad who has not acquired a solid

national consciousness and a political ideal squaring with the reality of the country. But in the prime of my youth, like any other young Vietnamese of the same condition, I did not think deeply about it and believed that everything was possible for me.

Every year, after nine months of work, came the three-month summer vacation when we could travel to any West European country at moderate costs provided you were an enterprising man, versed in the technique of hitchhiking or of picking grapes in fruit-laden vineyards.

Both through books and such exciting travels, I grew fonder of the European way of life, culture and humanism, at least in their showy, liberal appearance. In the first years of my life abroad, they helped alleviate somewhat the gnawing homesickness of a young student. But as time went by, this longing for the motherland bore down more and more heavily upon my soul.

In summer 1959, after taking a degree, I could have returned to be given a job in Hue or Saigon. At the time, the Diem regime in South Viet Nam looked more stable than ever and was sowing the illusion of "nationalism, democracy, freedom, personalism" among a number of Vietnamese intellectuals at home and abroad. Some school-mates of mine went back to South Viet Nam, one after the other. For my part, I could not yet make up my mind, because not yet satisfied with the scanty knowledge of literature and history I had acquired. Thereupon, I seemed to discover a new source of

inspiration : the spiritual beauty of a nation, my Vietnamese nation, from which I had been separated for six or seven years and to which I was eagerly turning my thought.

Once in a library I came upon two studies, one by Mr Nguyen Van Huyen (now a minister in the government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam) and the other by Mr Nguyen Van Khoan. The studies on the pastoral life such as alternate songs between a girl and her boyfriend, the ritual feast in a communal house, the house-on-stilts in Southeast Asia, were a complete revelation to me, because not until then had I found out that there was an age-old folk culture in Viet Nam, a beautiful, rich and deep culture with its optimistic and serene features, praising labour and love, glorifying the beautiful land of our ancestors, with its fine customs and habits, its traditional festivals full of historical, social and humanistic significance. In leafing through those books, I could see in my mind's eye the curved roof of a communal house, an age-old banyan tree and the blue river stretching in the mellow moonlight of a summer night in the Vietnamese countryside while boatmen's songs resound far and wide, and call up the nostalgia of every Vietnamese living abroad. It became clear to me that the rich, multiform Vietnamese civilization still promises many things to the researchers who could not be satisfied with what had been published in the books and papers of the colonial times. I began delving into the national traditions and the folk culture, prompted by this desire and also by a boundless love for my home-land.

Some years later, after completing my studies at the Institute of Ethnology in the *Musée de l'Homme*, I joined the French National Scientific Research Centre (CNRS) and worked under the guidance of Professor Condominas, a scholar versed in the culture of the High Plateaux peoples in South Viet Nam, who imparted to me his great admiration for the descendants of Dam San, Xing Nha, Khinh Zu, who had created the stone xylophone, the *Rong Chieng* dance, the long communal house and immortal epics.

In 1962, I became a member of the Asian Studies Association in Paris which gathered together most of the French Asian scholars and a contributor to some reviews in South Viet Nam like *Dai Hoc* (Hue) and *Bach Khoa* (Saigon) and also of some foreign magazines in Paris and Brussels, writing on subjects connected with Vietnamese ethnology like the communal house, the pagoda, the temple, harvest festivals, folk songs, etc...

Those were my student days and the early stage of my life as a scientific researcher, an even, uneventful succession of days of studies and work. My ten years from 1953 to 1963 were almost completely devoted to academic activity. All happenings back home, from the bloody victimization of the former members of the resistance and the savage "denounce and wipe out Communists" campaigns (of the Diem-Nhu brothers) to the uprisings of the patriots and the Buddhists and students against repression, terror and religious discrimination, hardly arrested my attention.

I thought such things were politics and as a scholar I'd better not have anything to do with them.

However, in those days, an event happened to me which I still remember very clearly and which marked the first step of my embarking on political life. In 1962 I met Dr. N.K.V., one of the leaders of the Vietnamese Residents' Union in Paris. I wanted to meet him to get information about the situation at home, to know the viewpoint of the Communists and also to see what a Vietnamese communist intellectual was like. He and I had many exchanges of views about a wide range of topics on the current political situation and national culture. At times our discussions were heated and frank. Even though in those days he had not succeeded in completely winning me over to his political outlook, I was nevertheless very delighted by these meetings from which I always emerged deep in thought about our discussions concerning national independence, the shaping of a national culture, the real implication of freedom, neo-colonialism, etc. Ten years have elapsed since and I still remember Dr. N.K.V. whom I regard as an elder brother and a respected friend who left me with an indelible impression of human sympathy during my first attempts to return to the fold.

Another overseas Vietnamese intellectual whom I highly value is Professor T.V.K., a well-known scholar now in the French National Scientific Research Centre. Professor T.V.K. is a great connoisseur of Vietnamese and Asian music which he has helped, with great success, to introduce to a wider world audience.

His exhaustive studies are greatly prized by international musicologists. As far as politics is concerned, he told me with genuine modesty that he knew too little about it and as a credulous man he could not be a good politician. Nevertheless, to my mind, he was engaged in politics in his own way, though not consciously. Unlike Dr. N.K.V., Professor T.V.K. did not join any organization of overseas Vietnamese nor did he take part in any meeting. Still, I could see in him a genuine patriot with strong national sentiments and a great love for the national culture. Moreover, I was particularly moved to see Professor T.V.K., like many other patriotic Vietnamese who had lived a long time far from the motherland talk with such a passionate and painful ring in his voice about the embattled motherland and of his beloved South Viet Nam under the iron heel of the American expeditionary corps. The images of villages burnt down by raiders, coconut groves withering beside a canal, dead bodies, horrified faces of women, old men and children beside pulled-down huts or behind barbed wire fences, all these scenes of devastation and mourning caused by American bombs and shells on both parts of Viet Nam which he and I watched on French television always tormented him atrociously. Once he told me he would like to give up his musical researches to go round the world to denounce the war crimes of the US aggressors. His patriotism and also his helpless agonies were passed on to me.

To keep abreast of the situation, to determine for oneself a standpoint in the common struggle of the

nation at this juncture was a pressing dictate of conscience: one question nagged at me day and night — should I return to the country or should I remain where I was? Towards 1961, Father L., director of the Hue University came to Paris to recruit staff from among the new graduates. He showed me the shortcomings of higher education in Saigon with its mongrel subjects — quite different from the programme taught in his Institute. He mentioned the results he hoped to obtain and promised to supply us with every thing we might need. He seemed to hold great influence in Central Viet Nam, where, together with Ngo Dinh Can and Archbishop Ngo Dinh Thuc, he enjoyed quite extensive powers. Almost every year he would fly to Paris to recruit teachers. But very few people took the bait, only about twenty among the thousands who left each year for America, Western Europe or other pro-US countries, and the hundreds of graduates. We listened to him with scepticism.

In the period from 1960 to 1963, those who left South Viet Nam to live in France included high dignitaries of the Diem regime, and French and Canadian priests expelled from Saigon. The Diem regime was losing its appeal. A priest from the *Missions de Paris*, one of my former teachers at *La Providence* (Hue) told me: "Ngo Dinh Can is a tinhorn tyrant." When I asked for more details, he murmured in my ear: "He is a bloodthirsty scoundrel. He has killed many of your countrymen in Hue and Central Viet Nam."

Living under a regime like that seemed to us beyond our strength. The Western press had many times denounced Diem's despotism. The politicians leaving South Viet Nam spoke of the frenzied and pitiless repression against ex-resistance members, all those the Saigon regime labelled as Viet Cong and also against ordinary members of the opposition. In summer 1963, the persecution of the Buddhists began. The situation in South Viet Nam was such that it prevented us from returning and collaborating with a regime which was the root cause of so many sufferings and which in addition was aiming to cut our country asunder, a crime which will be forever stigmatized by history as one of its worst, committed at the instigation of the US.

Some South Vietnamese nursed the illusion that the "November 1, 1963 revolution" would radically change the structure of the regime and bring about the necessary social and cultural transformation. We hoped to be able eventually to return home and take part in cultural activities. None of us thought of going into politics. But in the end nobody wanted to go back; for in Saigon the situation went from bad to worse. We were soon disillusioned and lost hope. A Diem regime without Diem, whether with Nguyen Khanh, or Quat, or Huong, or Thieu, or Ky, was set on top of the Saigon administration. The Americans started the bombing of North Viet Nam in autumn 1964 and their war of destruction in 1965. The Vietnamese residents in France strongly denounced Washington's acts. For one whole year, the question of returning

home, which had been gnawing at me all the time, put itself to me with particular acuteness. I must take my choice.

European civilization, the European way of life with all its amenities if you are wealthy and highly placed on the social scale is indeed very attractive. And at a given moment, when one grows blind to the disturbing political reality, and is concerned only with one's researches, which bring one money, a name and a position, one may be very readily tempted to choose to stay. But in South Viet Nam, the people, the students, the youth who took to the streets risked imprisonment, deportation and even death !

I knew that the majority of the overseas Vietnamese intellectuals wished to return to do something for the Fatherland. But I also knew that in some specific branches, there were not enough facilities at home for scientists to carry on their work. Then, their decision to stay was quite justifiable and I do believe that they will come back when our country begins large-scale construction. For them, it was their duty to stay behind. All tasks are glorious when one devotes one's work wholly to the interests of one's people and country. I took up the question of returning or staying with my acquaintances. Even my professors and friends were divided. One of them said to me: "You are a researcher in ethnology. So you'll be able to achieve many more interesting things back home, living among your own people." But some of my friends were against my going back to the country, expressing doubts whether I could do anything in the present conditions as war had spread to both zones.

After many months of indecision, in mid-1965 I decided to go back to Viet Nam.

A few years before Dr. N.K.V. had told me that US imperialism was scheming to colonize South Viet Nam and implant there its own brand of neo-colonialism. It had launched a special war, then a limited war in South Viet Nam. It was escalating the war with an air war against the North. My heart was wrung as I thought of the South and the North of our country then engulfed in a sea of fire and blood. I chose to return to the South to see with my own eyes what US "neo-colonialism" was like. Besides, I would strive to do something within the limits of my speciality as a contribution, however humble, to the building of national education and culture. And for justice's sake, if necessary, I too would take to the streets to join my people and the patriotic students, youth and my fellow intellectuals. Because, I said to myself, why couldn't I, a young intellectual, do what many others have done ? How could I resign myself to playing the part of an onlooker and watch with the indifference of an irresponsible man confined in his "ivory tower", without feeling ashamed of myself.

I left Paris in the closing days of August. Twelve years ago, I had left Viet Nam also in autumn; it is the season in which leaves turn yellow, and the climate grows milder.

Good bye Paris and its bustling streets, its crowded buses, Paris with its quiet libraries, institutes and museums, Paris so luxurious and so miserable with those sumptuous quarters — the *Opera*, the *Champs Elysées* —

displaying their opulence beside the slums ; Paris, the *Eiffel* tower, *Notre Dame* and the lovely river whose banks provide a refuge for lovers and tramps ; Paris in which I spent my youth amidst the friendship and sympathy of the French people. My youth was over and I carried with me many memories, many names which had become dear to me, many images not to be forgotten.

South Viet Nam city life in the period from 1965 to 1968

I arrived in Saigon under a burning sun at the end of autumn 1965. Flying over Cambodia, I saw, at the frontier, the first scenes of the war : forests stripped of foliage by defoliants and explosives. My plane increased its altitude over the Mekong delta because of the insecurity in that area. I could only see the colour of scorched earth and the many canals criss-crossing it.

Tan Son Nhat airfield. Hundreds of American jets and helicopters were stationed in the military sector. Sandbags and barbed wire entanglements were seen everywhere. Tanks roared past, kicking up a yellowish dust in the scorching mid-day sun. Fighters and bombers whirred noisily overhead on their way to Tay Ninh, Ca Mau or the southern provinces of Trung Bo. Meanwhile other warplanes left the 7th Fleet, Da Nang or Chu Lai bases to bomb Tri Thien or North Viet Nam. The martyrdom of our country extended

to every region. American bombs were poured on our land and fellow-countrymen. I recalled to mind the terrible scenes of slaughter I had seen on TV screens in France. At the mere sight of Tan Son Nhat, I received the physical shock of the US occupation of my country.

I had to travel 7 kilometres to Saigon. My first contact with the city left me with a curious, and very deep, impression : there were too many vehicles — motor bikes of all brands, mopeds, tricycles, motorcars, American and South Korean military trucks, police jeeps and US MP vans. The odour of petrol and thick clouds of smoke had seared and shrivelled up the trees lining the roadsides.

Saigon afforded the image of noisy luxury side by side with stark poverty. At every step you saw flashy new buildings. Magnificent villas with lawns and flower beds were surrounded with intricate barbed wire entanglements. American and South Korean sentries were everywhere posted in front of high buildings reserved for the occupation troops. The doors looked horrible, like fortresses with heaps of sandbags all around and heavy guns protruding their muzzles out of the loopholes. The special quarters reserved for the Americans and South Koreans recalled the " concessions " with huge buildings spreading over hundreds of metres.

The business quarters were swarming with people. Piles of American, Japanese and Formosan goods : all jumbled together on the shelves of department stores and shops : transistor sets, rolls of nylon,

tins of milk, grapes, apples, cigarettes... You could buy anything in the open-air markets, even drugs. I learnt later that you could even buy women there, discreetly of course: it was not quite a slave market but something like that.

A foreign correspondent wrote of Saigon as follows: "At the weekend, along *Catinat Street*, a fashionable road now rechristened *Tu Do Street*, Americans in their shirtsleeves staggered home with heavy packages wrapped with brown paper under their arms. Their PX shops were duty-free and they brought back *de luxe* goods which could not be obtained by the Vietnamese, victims of a high cost of living. In downtown Saigon, street girls, their faces daubed with paint or temporary wives of American officials could pick out the best beefsteaks, vegetables or fruit, for they earned in one day more than a Vietnamese professor could get in one week.

"Fashionable dancing halls, brightly-lit night clubs, opium dens and tea-rooms were mushrooming in the main thoroughfares of Saigon and Cholon. Nothing shocks the Vietnamese more than to see the Americans, their neighbours, strolling in shorts along the streets, their hairy chests in the wind and singing the 'Star Spangled Banner' at the top of their voices." (Reuter, Dec. 2, 1967).

I will stop speaking of the Saigon of the American occupation troops and of a Vietnamese minority — ministers, company directors, high-ranking officials, generals and politicians — all spongers who have feathered their own nests with the war. I want now to expatiate

on another Saigon, that belonging to the majority, the poor and the ordinary people. Let us visit the slums of Ban Co, Khanh Hoi, Cau Ong Lanh, Cho Ba Chieu, Nga Tu Bay Hien, Xom Chieu, etc..., shanty towns full of squalid huts made of planks and roofed with cardboard or metal sheets. Here the huts lean against one another and only keep standing thanks to some miracle of balance. Sometimes they are built on piles above the filthy and foul-smelling waters of a canal. Enormous heaps of rubbish lie on both sides of the alley slowly decomposing in the rain and sun. If anyone passes by millions of flies will rise up with a terrible buzz.

After a few weeks, I asked some old friends to take me to the slums. I could not merely look at them through the windows of my car; I wanted to mingle with those who, day after day, earned their living amidst that foul smell, to get better acquainted with the reverse of the medal.

I was first led to a locality queerly named *Xom Ma* (the Tomb Quarter). It was a slum in the heart of Saigon, some dozen metres from *Vo Tanh* Street, one of the main thoroughfares of the city lined with *de luxe* emporiums and movie-theatres. It was built on the site of an old cemetery, 200 metres square, hence its name. The tombs with their stones were still visible beside the huts erected on stilts all around and sometimes straddling them. Muddy streams of water ran along the alleyways and passers-by had to walk on the bricks laid here and there to avoid splashing themselves. It was a sunny day. What

would happen during a downpour — and it quite often rains heavily in Saigon — one could only guess.

The quarter was divided into alleys and the houses numbered. Some of them bore the inscription: "X. chief of block Y." It was inhabited by workmen, pedicab drivers, water carriers or street vendors, people who toiled hard from dawn to dusk and took refuge at night in those jerry-built huts. Grimy and sickly kiddies were playing near the garbage heaps, in the middle of the clouds of buzzing flies and the uproar of vehicles passing along *Vo Tanh* street. But amidst these slums rose one fine building, surrounded by barbed wire entanglements. It looked like a military post. It was a church. The people in charge were afraid that this clean dry place would be invaded by the inhabitants of that squalid locality. These wretched people had only the right to say prayers, not to make any demands, I thought bitterly.

This quarter was not the only one in Saigon, said my friends, there were many others just like it and even more wretched.

Saigon had large avenues crossed by hundreds of little lanes. The avenues were illuminated, their shop-windows floodlit with a riot of electricity while the lanes could not conceal their ugliness and poverty. A striking contrast!

The inhabitants were subjected to untold exactions. The Saigon press carried the following story: At *Cay Queo, Xom Ga* quarter, a GI was found killed. Was it a brawl, a murder, or a love affair or had he been disposed of by the patriots? It made no difference!

The police was out at work the following day. MPs and policemen searched every house and held up all traffic. Thousands of people were immobilized by the searches. Old people and children suffered like the others. Many families were left hungry as no movement was allowed. Others had their members taken away for "interrogation" (and one understands what this means in Saigon!) All this disturbance because of one GI killed!

Police round-ups, house demolitions, and evictions continued without letup, upsetting life in the quarter. I saw with my own eyes one case of arson the aim of which was to forcibly evict the inhabitants, and use the place to erect a building for the GIs. Thick black smoke rose in the sky. Agonizing cries were heard. Suit-cases miraculously spared, cardboard boxes, rags hurriedly gathered together, a cauldron, a pair of shoes... were lying at the foot of an old woman or a child staring at the flames gutting their house.

The boots of the GIs and South Koreans, the yoke of a gang of traitors, these had brought the people of Saigon to such a terrible state. I understood better the meaning of American aid, of the alliance with Washington, of the defence of freedom. The sight of these sufferings unfolding before my eyes made my heart bleed with grief.

The second city in South Viet Nam which I would like to mention is Hue, my childhood home town. Somehow or other it still kept its natural charm. There were not many new buildings; in this regard

the Saigon administration had been conspicuous by its inaction.

Hue breathes out poetry in its smallest sites despite its war wounds. That narrow strip of land leaning against the grim Truong Son range — an ideal revolutionary base — and facing a sun-bathed sea, is a landscape unique in its kind.

Hue, my native town was still there. But in reality, its natural beauty had been spoiled by traces of destruction. Some of the palaces, uncared for, had fallen in ruins. The banks of the Perfume River were a wilderness of wild grass.

The public gardens were poorly kept, benches were lying upside down and branches broken. Police and army jeeps came right into the squares and were seen roaming about Nguyen Hoang, Thuong Bac, Phu Van Lau as well as Le Loi streets.

Of course, the same contrast existed between luxury and misery. The difference was that the Hue people concealed their sufferings deep in their hearts. The hippies did not dare to make a display of their extravagance. Prostitution was more discreet. The inhabitants of Hue regarded the Americans with hatred and distrust. The tourist trips made by the latter in armoured cars with guns pointed in all directions were always greeted by well-aimed shots from snipers hidden in the outskirts of Hue.

Now a few words about Da Nang. It was a city completely occupied by the US army, a barbed-wire city with US offices and staffs everywhere. It was a completely unplanned city with skyscrapers next door to hovels

and huts nuzzling against brick houses. All this made Da Nang a repulsive place. The streets were bumpy and dusty; American military lorries had destroyed their surface and made pot-holes all along them. It was the city in which luxury clashed with misery, and nowhere else did I see such promiscuity. In the evening, the inhabitants shut themselves up in their homes, leaving the streets free for the activities of the thugs and the whores. Dancing halls were packed with GIs, South Korean mercenaries and Saigon soldiers. Gambling dens were open all night. My duty called me to Da Nang every month but I never stayed there more than 24 hours. The uninterrupted whirr of jet planes got on my nerves. The guerillas tightened their noose around the city, those at Hoa Vang harassed the GIs even in their sleep. Evening after evening, the noise of firing would remind the inhabitants: "Don't lose heart, the patriots have not laid aside their arms!"

What I saw in the cities was enough to give me a clear picture of the evils of American aggression. Lip service was paid to freedom, national sovereignty, nationalism and so on but it was all humbug. The reality is that South Viet Nam is purely and simply occupied by the US troops. The real master of the cities in the South was neither the people nor the Saigon administration, but the US expeditionary forces. Freedom was just a bait. Neo-colonialism sneaks in under the most subtle forms, and this makes it all the more dangerous. Later, I will speak of this again.

Three years of research and teaching

Back in South Viet Nam I taught ethnography and Vietnamese folk literature at the Faculties of Letters in Hue and Saigon Universities and at the same time I continued my own researches in those fields.

Both research and teaching in South Viet Nam were full of short-comings and a new arrival like myself could easily find gaps in the field of social sciences such as the lack of cohesion and judgement and the discord which existed among scholars. Those who worked in state organizations could not stand private groups or individual researchers.

The same rivalry, open or hidden, existed among the researchers of the Historical Institute and the Faculties.

I tried to discern the causes of such a situation. For instance there was the question of university diplomas. Those who had studied abroad for their doctorate or *agrégation*, even if it was twenty or thirty years ago; looked down on anyone who had no university diploma or one of an inferior grade, whatever their present level of culture. A doctor in linguistics graduated from an American university, like MDH, was contemptuous of Nguyen Bat Tuy, the author of many books and a very highly cultured linguist. MDH never took the trouble to read anything Tuy published. Others, as I came to know later on, were but pseudo-professors and pseudo-researchers labelled "speculators in culture" by their circles in South Viet Nam. The main characteristic of these

intellectuals was their arrogance, conceit, and contempt for anyone other than themselves. They held the highest posts and did not necessarily possess any academic qualification. One on these was MDT, dean of the Saigon Faculty of Letters, a chemical engineer appointed by the French colonialists professor, then dean of the Faculty, and evacuated from Hanoi to Saigon. Under the Saigon administration he remained in favour and dominated higher education in South Viet Nam.

Aware of the merits of Mr Nguyen Bat Tuy, I suggested to the Council of Professors of the Hue Faculty that they persuade him to collaborate. Some influential members, including the dean and several full professors, stated their opposition on the pretext that Mr Tuy was not qualified to be a lecturer and could only work as an assistant. After a stormy debate and a vote of the enlarged council I carried the day. But Mr Tuy never came to the Faculty for another reason. To his application for accommodation within the university, he received the reply that "only lecturers with a doctor's degree are accommodated within the University." Mr Tuy, with reason, refused to set foot in the Faculty.

Genuine researchers were left to fend for themselves without any help from the administration. Only their friends gave them some consolation and encouragement. But it was rare to find people with the same interests as yours. Hence, a paradoxical situation arose : the official research services were skeletal and impotent while private research and cultural groups were

mushrooming, and were credited with some successful work.

The administration neglected the organization of research, in fact it showed itself so eager to impede research work that the Saigon press and enlightened opinion agreed in condemning the 'deplorable state' of culture in South Viet Nam. The pro-government newspaper *Chinh Luan* remarked that the cultural standard of South Viet Nam is very low, and for more than a decade successive governments in Saigon have simply ignored its importance. "We have done nothing, built nothing, made no efforts... no research work worthy of the name has been published... nobody cares about culture. A grave danger threatens us : we have become uprooted from our culture. It is strange to see Vietnamese cry up American culture..." These remarks at least show the administration's lack of any cultural policy.

If any, it consists only of manœuvres to control scientific researches in particular and suppress the traditional national culture in general, to ban or stun any healthy, progressive culture fostered by patriotic intellectuals. More concretely, the official cultural establishments like the Ministry of Culture, the Viet Nam Cultural Association and the Historical Institute, which are provided with abundant equipment and funds from American aid, have, however, shown utter incapacity in research and the study of traditional culture as well as in the development of a new culture. Needless to say, these organs do not lack initiative in public relations, such as

organizing exhibitions and lectures, commemorations of Alexandre de Rhodes (1), of Nguyen Du's (2) bicentenary, and publishing books on such occasions. However, just a glance into the substance of these fakes and we can easily see their shallowness and formalism.

Then there is another field where much could have been done for social sciences in South Viet Nam but where, in fact, virtually nothing has been done : that is the universities. I have made this remark not as a casual observer but as an eyewitness. For more than a decade now, the universities in the South have neglected one of their important tasks and main functions, namely to carry out scientific researches and train researchers. Throughout all these years, nothing of value, either in terms of quantity or quality, has been published by those establishments. One may ask how many researchers can take pride in having been trained in a university, how many of them have been encouraged, assisted and recognized by the universities !

The cultural disaster brought about by the anti-cultural policy of the Saigon administration has generated a complete chaos of viewpoints, methods and organizations in the whole system of social sciences in the South. For example with regard to

(1) Alexandre de Rhodes, a Spanish missionary, the supposed inventor of the Romanized script of Vietnamese.

(2) Nguyen Du (pronounced Zu) (1765-1820), nationally known poet of Viet Nam, author of *Kiêu*.

methodology, many works are entitled treatises or studies while they are only masses of data and information taken from books and magazines dating back to the colonial and feudal times or from new books, principally those published in Hanoi, without acknowledging their sources. The *Luoc Khao Than Thoai Viet Nam* (Summary Study of Vietnamese Legends) by Nguyen Dong Chi in North Viet Nam has become *Than Thoai Viet Nam* (Vietnamese Legends) published in a collection very ambitiously titled *Viet Nam Van Hoc Toan Thu* (Encyclopedia of Vietnamese Literature) by an author in South Viet Nam. Some works contain quite good information but this is presented in such a disorderly and unsystematic manner that one gets the impression that the authors, when compiling their books, were only guided by their own logic and judgement, and not by the objective rules of any scientific methodology. More confused still are the positions and viewpoints of the authors. Each of them can boast a position but the common overriding trait is the outdated, anti-national outlook, especially in history and literature...

Some writers denied the authenticity of the Hung Vuong (1) period, and expressed great esteem for Ma Yuan (2) (just like the French colonialists in the past),

(1) Hung Vuong : the first kings of Viet Nam.

(2) Ma Yuan, a Han general who suppressed the Trung Sisters' uprising.

Gia Long and Phan Thanh Gian (1), were considered patriots and so were Truong Vinh Ky, Pham Quynh, Nguyen Van Vinh (2) and the *Tu Luc Van Doan* (3) group. Others minimized the historical role of the masses, and distorted our contemporary history, especially the August Revolution and the resistance to French colonialism. Still others showed that they were apolitical by separating culture from economics or politics.

In South Viet Nam, the only work of any value came from groups of independent researchers such as Trinh Bay's (Statements), Nguyen Van Trung's, the An Cu and Dong nai groups and the Department of Geographical and Historical Studies of the Saigon Teachers' College... These were quite remarkable and worthy of encouragement. By their own efforts, Huynh Minh, Toan Anh, Do Bang Doan, and others have published monographs full of interesting details. On the occasion of the bicentenary of Nguyen Du, many researchers wanted to bring out a work on the great poet, but unable to find a backing in Saigon, they had to have it printed by the *Ecole*

(1) Gia Long (1762-1820) : the first king of the Nguyen dynasty, who called on the French to help him fight the Tay Son national movement led by Nguyen Hue.

Phan Thanh Gian, a dignitary of the Nguyen Court at the time of French conquest.

(2) Truong Vinh Ky, Pham Quynh, Nguyen Van Vinh : more or less notorious collaborators with the French.

(3) Tu Luc Van Doan, a group of bourgeois reformist writers in the 1930's in Viet Nam.

Française d'Extrême Orient in Paris on the condition that all the articles be translated under the supervision of Maurice Durand. That was most regrettable ! The groups of independent researchers had to fend for themselves, without any official subsidies. That truth was revealed to me when I was cooperating with the *Trinh Bay* group. We had to use part of our salaries — sometimes a third — to print our works amidst the complaints of our deprived families. It was in fact an absurdity to devote our savings to research work while prices were rising skyhigh. We went in search of patrons by giving our publications to businessmen but they listened lukewarmly to our pleas as they could not gain any profit, and were moreover afraid of getting involved in our affairs without knowing our political convictions : they would find themselves in a fine mess if our writings criticized the government. For all these reasons, there were no Maecenases for culture in South Viet Nam.

During my whole stay in the occupied zone, I was never able to make any headway with the government research services. In the *Trinh Bay* group, I published an ethnographic handbook, a study on An Duong Vuong (1), and a collection of articles on Phan Boi Chau on the occasion of his centenary written in collaboration with others. My contribution was modest but real.

(1) An Duong Vuong : king of Viet Nam (3rd century B.C.).

When I was in Hue, a group of intellectuals set up a centre of research on sciences and humanism, which published a bulletin, *Studies on Viet Nam*, of which I was editor-in-chief. In two years, 1966 and 1967, we were able to bring out eight mimeographed issues signed by well-known names such as Nguyen Bat Tuy, Tran Van Khe, Nguyen Van Trung, Buu Cam, Tran Van Toan. One of these issues carried Nguyen Bat Tuy's open letter to the Saigon Ministry of Culture asking for assistance in the foundation of an Ethnological and Linguistic Research Centre with a detailed programme of action conceived on scientific lines. That letter had a great repercussion among researchers and in University circles. Not being able to turn a blind eye, the administration informed us that it had taken note of our suggestion and that authorization would be forthcoming. In the following number, our bulletin showed up the inefficiency and general inadequacy of the Historical Institute — the main organization responsible for social studies — written in an article under a pseudonym by a member of the Institute. Because of that article, the Ministry of Culture called me in, took me to task for having criticized a government institution to the benefit of a private organ even before the founding of the latter, and in the end denied me authorization. All our nice projects collapsed. South Vietnamese researchers work in isolation and obscurity without receiving help or encouragement from the government. Their publications fell into a vacuum. There was a large public, but they heard neither praise nor blame from it apart from their friends and the circle of students. That silence

tormented us; with anguish we wondered whether we should continue and who would read us? I am certain that in other circumstances, enjoying other working conditions, the researchers would be in a position to do much more and better work. But these conditions are not possible in South Viet Nam at present.

One thing comforted me: contact with my students who were so thirsty for knowledge. They studied in very difficult conditions. Most of them came from poor families. They had suffered innumerable privations and tribulations for more than ten years before entering the university. Their working conditions were rendered even more complex and difficult by the shortcomings and defects of the higher education system in South Viet Nam. Nevertheless, they worked hard and their studiousness commanded our admiration. That was not the case in Europe where I noticed that most of the students spent half of their time pleasure-seeking. In South Viet Nam, the students must work hard to graduate and get a job. To pass or fail in an examination will have a decisive effect on their own lives and those of their families. They are very eager to learn, to delve into the national culture, and at the same time to acquaint themselves with the modern civilizations of the world. They are also very keen on learning foreign languages to be able to read foreign books. Outside class-time, they read in libraries late into the night. They wish to build a fine teacher-student relationship, especially with those professors who are not too arbitrary in

their demands and haughty in their manners. It is true that there are a few of them who, under certain circumstances, forget all about the present state of their country and confine themselves in their "ivory tower" or dream of an affluent life. But the majority of them have acquired a correct outlook and are filled with youthful zeal to do something for their country and people. And those boys and girls have not hesitated to take to the streets to fight for justice and the national cause.

Most lecturers had adopted a peculiar way of life, acting the part of functionaries whose profession was, to dispense education without considering whether or not that education was suited to their pupils; what they feared most was to be censured by the authorities. But there was a minority who thought and acted otherwise. They had a strong desire to do something for higher education, they were eager to help the students and were dissatisfied with the present situation. And so it did not surprise me at all when, in 1968, I met in the liberated zone former colleagues such as Tran Ba Chu, a lecturer at the Teachers' School in Hue, Nguyen Huu Van, a lecturer at the National School of Music in Hue, Nguyen Van Kiet, lecturer in philosophy at the Faculty of Letters in Saigon, and Ton That Duong Ky, a lecturer at the Saigon and Van Hanh Universities. They had all responded to the call of the Fatherland and joined the armed struggle.

The lecturers were right to show their dissatisfaction. Higher educatio was in a crisis. The

press was always speaking about its critical situation and suggesting ways to reform it. Why? Everyone agreed that higher education

1 — was mongrel, rootless and haphazard;

2 — was remote from reality; and

3 — had no national stamp (in fact it was frankly reactionary).

It was a copy of the French system, being heir to it. In the first years, the teachers were picked from among the old intelligentsia, mostly educated in France. They were francophiles, imbued with French literature, or rather they worshipped French literature. At the Saigon Faculty of Letters, one dean was so fond of speaking French that he used it nine times out of ten: his students nicknamed him "Prof. Francophile and Francophone."

It was self-evident that, under such conditions, the curriculum of higher education could only be a servile copy of the French programme. Besides, many of the lecturers were Frenchmen: for instance in the beginning they accounted for 80% in the Faculty of Medicine. The Americans were not in favour of this state of things and tried little by little to abolish French influence by introducing their own advisers and teachers.

These soon started coming in droves. The most spectacular group was that from Michigan State University which took in hand the formation of heads of provinces, districts and the police, and chiefs of intelligence services.

Francophile directors of institutes and deans of faculties were replaced by "Americanophiles" graduated from American schools. American influence prevailed in the new establishments such as the Can Tho University, inaugurated in the presence of many members of the US Embassy, and with many American advisers. The libraries were full of American books and Vietnamese teachers were mostly trained in the US.

This double domination impeded the exclusive use of Vietnamese as a teaching medium in South Viet Nam's universities, a paradoxical situation which still exists to this day. But French was too firmly entrenched at the Faculty of Medicine. (In Hue, Vietnamese got the upper hand and the people there were quite proud of that victory). And the Americans had their own Medical School at Cho Lon inaugurated in 1967. It received assistance from the US Embassy, and was in open competition with the Saigon school.

The students waged a persistent struggle to have the Vietnamese language used as the teaching medium in the universities. Finally, the Saigon administration, under public pressure, issued a circular providing for the use of Vietnamese as teaching vehicle while reserving for foreign professors the right to lecture in foreign languages. Vietnamese professors are expected to use Vietnamese, but this is not compulsory. The result is that nothing has changed.

The higher education programme in South Viet Nam is entirely patterned on the French curricula except for the teaching of Vietnamese. As for other subjects like philosophy, history, geography, French, English... the French stamp is much more apparent and is still more complete in the science and medical faculties. The libraries of the universities are filled with high piles of French and American books beside a few Vietnamese ones.

To follow the lectures, the students must grapple with foreign languages. On the one hand, this incites the students to work hard but, on the other hand, it reflects the pitiful dependence of Saigon university education on foreigners.

Higher education in South Viet Nam imitates France in feeding the students with a lot of theoretical notions to the detriment of practice. The students of the faculties of sciences were infatuated with theories and had all their courses at their finger-tips, but they were almost completely ignorant of reality in their own field. Theory and practice were two quite different things. The schools trained bachelors of science, very well versed in theory, and turned them into lycée teachers who just repeated mechanically to their pupils what they had learned from books. The graduates from the Phu Tho Technological Centre, which specialized in the formation of engineers, were notorious for their incompetence. Twenty engineers were graduated each year by the School of Electricity as

against two hundred bachelors of science. The administration limited the number of engineers, doctors of medicine, pharmacists, and dentists as these were the most lucrative professions. In a society exclusively swayed by money, that measure aimed at protecting the rights of a small minority who had close links with the administration. The economic crisis, the shortage of doctors and the shameless exploitation of patients were not of the least concern to the rulers.

After law, the Faculty of Letters had the biggest enrolment. But the graduates from the Faculties of Letters and Law ended up by becoming government officials. Very few who graduated from the Faculty of Letters became writers, or simply researchers. The university's main purpose was to form functionaries, who would be sufficiently qualified in theory to meet the requirements of the administration. That was all.

The following facts suffice to bring out the anti-national and reactionary character of South Vietnamese higher education. At the Faculty of Letters for instance, all the important subjects like Vietnamese linguistics, literature and history were subordinate to the main subjects like world philosophy, English and French. In ethnology, the students continued to learn the outdated and erroneous views of the colonialist archaeologist Janse with regard to the origins of the Vietnamese nation and culture. As far as Viet Nam's history is concerned, references are often made to works by such colonialist historians as Gaspardone, Durand, Maspero, Maybon, and others. The word

"reference" is a euphemism : in reality the teachers plagiarise those authors' ideas to compile a sort of hodge-podge course full of obsolete colonialist notions. It is no wonder, then, that a professor once praised the West for its many contributions to Viet Nam, and openly commented that but for the missionary Alexandre de Rhodes the Vietnamese would not have had their present romanized script. Another professor extolled Gia Long as a "national hero" (!) credited with unifying the country. He also branded the peasant uprisings as "bands of usurpers and rebels."

Attacked on all sides by English and French, Vietnamese is not even now the sole teaching vehicle in South Vietnamese universities. The scientific words coined by many teachers for their own use, have never been generally recognized. Due to private initiative they have been chosen in a happy-go-lucky manner.

I lived dull and desperate days at the Saigon University. Can there be greater frustration than seeing every year a large number of the students in your charge fail in the exams? On an average, out of one hundred students, more than 75 were rejected. What will the drop-outs do? Join the army or just accept any job to earn their living? The teacher does not know. But one thing is certain: all the ardour which the teacher has shown in imparting his knowledge to his students has ceased to have any effect on most of them.

Even if they find time to meditate on the lessons taught by their former instructors, they will be quickly

forced back to the implacable reality of making money to maintain their families and themselves.

I was also sorry to see that higher education remained unproductive, as if it had nothing to do with research. Hue University used to make a contribution to research but this was only in the period from 1958 to 1964. For 16 or 17 years Saigon University used to publish an annual review but this ceased to appear in 1963. If they wanted to get something printed, teachers had to apply elsewhere and received no assistance and encouragement from their employers.

Some of us young teachers made a point of keeping in close touch with the students. That is far from being the normal relationship between teachers and students. There existed a considerable "generation gap" and deep mutual prejudice and distrust between them. Some of the teachers complained that the students gave too little time to studies and too much time to politics. When students invited their teachers to join in the struggle, they flatly refused with unconcealed anger. A small number of teachers who realized that they could not stand aloof from the students' action, displayed support, signed petitions in favour of the students, and even attended teach-ins, artistic performances and summer camps together with the students.

That sort of action was not praised nor even commented on. Some people regarded it as a thoughtless, useless and even stupid act.

I was once struck with an impotent rage when, during class time, a student was summoned to the management's office to be taken away never to return : the Saigon administration had sent police or security agents to arrest him. True, they had not broken into the class-room but nonetheless had apprehended a student under the nose of his helpless teacher.

I saw thoughtful eyes and serious looks when in my lectures I touched upon the patriotic sentiments, national spirit and traditional undauntedness of our people. I was summoned and given a warning by the deans of the Faculties of Letters of the Saigon and Hue Universities after I had told the students that the An Duong Vuong legend was a tribute to the stamina of our country and the extraordinary achievements of our people in the early stage of national construction and defence, a lesson of vigilance of the people against the aggressors and a denunciation of wars of aggression. I was also taken to task after telling my students that Nguyen Du, through his story *Kieu*, had denounced social injustices, condemned oppression and exploitation and praised the resistance of the downtrodden to the rotten feudalist regime.

The years of my lecturership at the Saigon and Hue Universities were a succession of joys and sorrows, amidst the ebullient militancy of the people. I shall never forget my courageous colleagues and especially the students who refused to bow to brute force and took to the streets at the sacred call of the country in defence of the just cause of our indomitable nation.

My Meetings with Radical Intellectuals

The intelligentsia was concentrated in the big towns and cities such as Saigon, Hue, Da lat, Can Tho, consisting mainly of high-ranking and middle officials, university professors, teachers of secondary education (lycées and private schools), doctors, pharmacists, dentists, lawyers. The two main characteristics of these intellectuals were an ivory-tower mentality and a desire to feather their own nests by various means such as opening private schools, lawyer's offices, doctor's consulting rooms. They abstained from any involvement in current events and politics.

A university professor said : " The Americans have succeeded in one thing here in Viet Nam — they have managed to sow discord and suspicion among us." Right from the beginning a friend of mine told me to be careful what I said. All those who had studied in the US were thought to be more or less favourable to the CIA. This was an obvious exaggeration because even though a man worked in a government department and got money from the US, he could not forget his Vietnamese origin. Certainly, it is true that some people were paid by the CIA to sneak into intellectual circles and sow discord or, worse still, to denounce the patriots to the authorities so that they could be arrested and thrown into prison. Intellectuals who disowned themselves in this way did not deserve our attention. In the university campus itself I knew a professor, a member of the Central Committee of the *Quoc Dan Dang*, a fanatically anti-communist

party. He was always strongly attacking the Americans in his conversations. We listened to him with reserve and I learnt later that he was simply acting as a provocateur, and that by attacking the Americans he aimed to find out those who shared his views. Because of this general atmosphere of suspicion, I had only limited contact with the Southern intelligentsia. When I spoke of current events, my companions were suspicious of me and made themselves scarce for fear of having to do with an agent provocateur. For my part I did not dare to speak openly for I did not know who I was speaking to. I could be followed and arrested just like anybody else! It is sad to say so; but everywhere I looked I saw the darkness of suspicion.

In the cities of South Viet Nam there were also a number of intellectuals dubbed radicals. I was not a radical myself but I was in close contact with radical intellectuals. I wanted to know their minds and, even more, I also hoped to let them know part of mine.

The "radical intellectual" or "leftist intellectual" label is no novelty. It dates back to the French colonial period when it was used to designate intellectuals of a socialist tendency who dared voice their opposition to and take action against French rule. The present-day radicals have inherited the glory of those pioneers but the whole situation has changed. To do them justice, it is not they who call themselves radical intellectuals, it is the townsfolk. The men in the street admire them, the students worship them,

the rightists name them leftists or Communist sympathizers and the Saigon administration brands them as agitators. I do not mean members of the so-called Radical Nationalist Party of Nguyen Van Bong because the South Viet Nam townspeople have never regarded them as radicals. The genuinely radical intellectuals are the most active in all spheres, those who are really "involved." But they must find a social basis to rely on, and in this case it is a religious organization. They are all members of a Buddhist sect or the Christian Church. I have the impression that they ould be isolated and powerless unless protected by a religion. And it was precisely because of the lack of such protection that I could not become a radical intellectual. I knew very well that I would at once be gagged if I talked the way they do. The radical intellectuals in South Viet Nam's cities are prolific writers and tireless speakers. Their influence is most clearly felt among the college and school students. They eagerly take part in the students' movement, teach-ins, cultural socials, summer camps, social and charitable actions of which they are zealous supporters. The Christian students are grouped within the Christian Action Movement and the Christian Working Youth whose activities are mainly concerned with social affairs. The Buddhists also have many similar movements, especially the "Village of Love" drive which undertakes to promote mutual assistance among the people in the outlying villages of Saigon so as to make good the ravages of war.

The "School of Buddhist Youth in Service of Society" is headed by a monk called N.H. I was several times invited to speak there. I dealt with a number of questions concerning national culture and folk literature. I found the audiences very attentive. Many of the listeners later came to me for more details on the questions discussed. I asked them why they had entered this school and they replied that since South Viet Nam society was full of injustices they wanted to do something to lessen the people's sufferings. I noticed that the Buddhist spirit of tolerance and mutual love was quite deeply rooted in the young people. In particular, they lived simply and worked hard, both mentally and manually. They hoped to be able once back in their villages to use the knowledge acquired at school in agriculture, sanitation and medical work, to help better the lot of the people whose life was still too primitive. However, their activities were like a drop in the ocean. I could not help wondering whether the radical intellectuals who encouraged their students in charity were simply engaged in reformist activities or were themselves a prey to utopian dreams.

To better understand the radical intellectuals and their activities, I visited a Buddhist "village of love". The monk N.H. took a group of university professors and students to a village near Saigon, where Buddhist activists had organized a "clean-up" day, built a primary school and a dispensary with bamboo and palm leaves contributed by the people. The children were given hair cuts, those suffering from boils

were administered ointment and those who were skinny were given vitamin tablets. I was told that most of the kids of the 7-10 years age group had never gone to school. Now they were attending an ABC class. I arrived at the village just as a Buddhist anniversary was being commemorated. Children were distributed sweets and taught songs. The students also sang for them. Together with Reverend N.H. and some of my friends, I called on a number of families. They were in general very poor. The village had a new communal house and a new asphalted road running past the village office.

Those with money (landlords, rich peasants) had radio sets, mopeds, outboard motor boats, etc.; they lived just like the city people as they were only about a dozen kilometres from Saigon. But this outward prosperity was only for a minority of notables who owned immense property. Most of the inhabitants were in a miserable condition, living in dilapidated huts, infected with disease; their children, wretched and illiterate, played on dusty roads or wallowed in the mud. It was terrible to think of districts far from Saigon. Certainly they must lead an even more miserable existence not to speak of the American bombs and toxic chemicals which must leave indelible marks on our villages.

I wondered how many "villages of love" had been built and what they had accomplished. All the Buddhist activists could do, as far as I could see, was to

momentarily relieve those unfortunate people of their unending sufferings.

I had close contacts with radical intellectuals, sometimes eating at the same table and sleeping in the same bed as them and holding interminable discussions about the political situation. They were the discontented who suffered greatly from the arbitrary attacks of officials and from their own impotence and inability to find any remedy. They agreed on just one point: in the present circumstances they should write and speak in order to escape from their inaction. They would not dream of collaborating with the government even though they kept aloof from all political activities. N.V.T., a university professor once said to me: "We write, write, without worrying about whether anyone reads us or not, until we fall from weariness!" He added, "Our activities have to be confined to writing and speaking alone."

Some time later, I was even more disappointed. One professor wrote an article about the United States lauding the "revolution of the wealthy." He denied the possibility of any revolution made by the masses and came to the conclusion that one should not make a revolution, only reforms, because "all revolution is by definition opposed to freedom." However I knew that he wrote articles violently attacking the US and the government, and was thus a patriot. Nevertheless the radical intellectuals could not deny the role of the masses in revolutions all over the world. They were not

ignorant of the sad state of Czarist Russia and the present might of the Soviet Union. The nationalist radical intellectuals went even further: they fear all changes which did not bring them any benefit. I have little to say about them on the personal plane. They were very good and agreeable colleagues who were painstaking and competent. But I could not be in complete agreement with them. Faced with all the havoc wrought by the US expeditionary forces, we should not stay passive, but work more eagerly to overthrow the governments which have successively pillaged our country. The action carried out by the students seemed to show me the way, and I joined their ranks My conviction, at least on this point, took me away from the road trodden by my "radical" friends. Moral weariness lay in wait for them and was their most redoubtable threat. However I was filled with the hope that our roads would meet soon. With their great intellectual integrity, sooner or later they will find the true road.

Later, in the liberated areas, I followed step by step the political evolution of my friends. I was overjoyed and proud to learn that they had braved all repression — tear gas and bludgeons — and taken to the streets to demonstrate with the students. All the frenzy of the police could not break their determination. Are they going to move in the direction I have been longing for? The hard trials they are going through will unquestionably lead them to the truth very soon.

In the "Spring of Dissidence"

Early in September 1965, I returned to Hue and worked at the Faculty of Letters. And so I became witness of a violent struggle against conscription in every city. Thieu and Ky had been in power for only three months when they unleashed a massive round-up for recruits. Young men were hunted in the streets and pulled out of cinema queues. Policemen forced doors open and ransacked houses from top to bottom. Even young bonzes were victims of the man-hunt. People regarded it as a plague.

Hue was the first to protest. Then the wave of demonstrations spread to Da Nang, Saigon and other towns. Toward the end of August and beginning of September, the youth in Hue shouted slogans against the dictatorship. People shouting through megaphones called for the overthrow of the Thieu-Ky junta. In mid-autumn 1965 the city was in a state of ferment with parades of students and school children in the day time and vigils at night, teach ins on the political situation, anti-war songs in the light of bonfires. Students' representatives fired questions at the local authorities about the presence of GIs in South Viet Nam, and demanded the abolition of conscription. To quell their growing discontent, a promise was made that their demands would be met. The movement abated towards the end of the year but swirled up again with increased vigour in the beginning of 1966.

In early 1966 and especially from March to June, Hue city was seething with political unrest during the 100-day break-away from the Saigon regime in Central Viet Nam. Taking advantage of the scramble for power among the ruling clique of Nguyen Van Thieu, Nguyen Cao Ky and Nguyen Van Co, the youth, students and pupils launched a great mass movement against US intervention and military dictatorship. The movement originating from Hue, especially from the *Tu Dam* pagoda, spread south to all Central Viet Nam cities including Da Nang and finally to Saigon and the Mekong Delta provinces. Millions of people in all the cities, including some in the quisling administration in Hue and Da Nang, associated themselves with the struggle. The Buddhists in Central Viet Nam succeeded in winning over most of the soldiers and officers of the 1st Corps Area and the city police. The Municipal Council and the provincial Council also took an anti-US and anti-Thieu stand. The main watchwords of the movement — the resignation of the Thieu-Ky-Co triumvirate, an end to US intervention in South Viet Nam and national self-determination — enjoyed extensive support from broad masses of the people.

For 100 days, meetings, demonstrations, market strikes and school strikes succeeded one another without a break. Da Nang and Hue were literally swarming with demonstrators. The foreign press wrote about the events: "On March 23, 1966, the order for a general strike received almost total support at Da Nang and Hue. At Da Nang all activity ground to a halt. Leaflets were distributed accusing the government of handing over many bases to foreign

troops. The day before the demonstrators had occupied the broadcasting station and Phu Bai airfield. The general strike has paralysed Hue and Da Nang completely."

Foreign press agencies reported: "Today in Da Nang, the students, school children and Buddhists have shouted anti-US and anti-government slogans. The struggle has brought the city to a standstill."

Three days later, on March 26, tens of thousands of youth and students marched through the streets shouting slogans like: "Defend national sovereignty!" "Long live democracy!", "Down with colonialism!", "Long live fighting Central Viet Nam!". The population of Hue, Thua Thien and the whole of Central Viet Nam was overjoyed at the news of these demonstrations.

During these 100 days of struggle, Radio Hue had time to expose the Thieu-Ky-Co clique. The public address system was surrounded by crowds of people who listened to the violent indictment against the authorities and showed their anger. On April 3, Thieu was hauled over the coals: "Nguyen Van Thieu, the most crafty element of the 'Committee directing the State' is the man most responsible for the misfortunes now descending upon the country. Besides him and Cabot Lodge, Nguyen Cao Ky is nothing but a bellicose runt, a puppet manipulated by Washington and Nguyen Van Thieu... Thieu is the worst kind of scoundrel and has kowtowed to every regime so as to climb up to his present position.

"As 'Chief of State' or rather President of the 'Committee directing the State' he has handed over the political future of Viet Nam to the Americans who are free to land as many troops as they like and occupy whatever base they want.

"He is the incarnation of the most anti-revolutionary elements and the most corrupted traitors. Our people must no longer allow him to remain in office... The foe we have to fight is none other than Nguyen Van Thieu and his clique..."

Reading that passage 5 years later only confirms the accuracy of its accusations. Thieu was justly condemned. And this counter-revolutionary, a traitor to his country, continues to give help to the Americans in their attempts to carry out their dark designs!

Let us return to the struggle in spring 1966 in Central Viet Nam, that heroic and martyred land.

At the peak of the effervescence came a demonstration on April 2, 1966 with tens of thousands of people, youth, students and school-children starting from the Phu Van Lau Palace on the bank of the Perfume River and proceeding to the residential districts reserved for the Americans on the other bank of the river (also called the Triangle). I was among the demonstrators that day. The patriotic zeal of the people and students had been imparted to me and urged me out into the streets. Some of my elder colleagues did not march but stood on the pavement and called out encouragement words. The people and especially the students and pupils were greatly inspired by the presence of a large number of intellectuals and young

lecturers in the marching columns. T.B.C, a lecturer at the Teachers' College, and I were holding a big and quite heavy banner we had received from two students. The cameras of the journalists and secret agents took snapshots of the crowd and later on one of these was sent to my 75-year-old father, who was living in Da Nang. Its message was evident: you should warn your son against rashness: it might bring disaster. I only smiled when my father told me about it. And I tried my best to reassure him in face of these contemptible attempts at pressure and intimidation.

The city was rocked by the shouting of slogans. Now and then a shout rang out: "Down with American imperialism!" This was something very new because the US had just begun a massive troop commitment into South Viet Nam. At first, it caused some surprise but the "Down with American imperialism!" battle-cry soon became familiar.

Early in May, the US information Hall in Hue was set on fire and the US Consulate sacked. Thousands of books, papers, films, and gramophone records were consumed by the flames. Youth and students stood beside the bonfires and sang to the rousing cheers of the onlookers. On May 17, a Saigon lieutenant named Nguyen Dai Thuc was shot dead by the police when the US adviser John Platt and Saigon General Huynh Van Cao arrived in Hue. On May 26, tens of thousands of people, including 300 monks and many soldiers attended the funeral of lieutenant Thuc. A sea of men and banners amidst thunderous shouts of "Down with US imperialism! Down with the Hitlerite Thieu-Ky clique!"

Many army and police units gathered into the "Nguyen Dai Thuc Brigade," youth and students formed "Death-Braving Volunteers Group" and got ready to cope with any counter-attacks made by the Saigon regime.

Meanwhile President L.B. Johnson was watching these events closely, the US embassy in Saigon endeavoured to bring them under control and the American advisers in the First Army Corps were openly intervening in order to affect their development. Colonel A.L. Hamban, a military adviser, was present at the HQ of the First Army Corps on the morning of May 15 when Thieu-Ky troops entered Da Nang. On May 17, General John Platt, commanding the Marines, accompanied Huynh Van Cao in his attempts at conciliation in Da Nang. The same day, Hamban flew to Hue. The foreign press admitted that the attack made against Hue by Phan Van Khoa (the head of the province, driven away by the break-away movement) had been prepared by the Americans. Lieutenant-colonel Bishop, deputy-adviser to the First Division, bragged that he had brought in 1,200 soldiers to repress the mass movement.

... At Washington's insistence, Thieu, Ky and Co staged a political congress in Saigon at which they proclaimed the election of a constituent assembly and bought over Buddhist renegades through the agency of Thich Tam Chau.

The demonstration in Da Nang were drowned in blood. A US spotter plane was shot down. In Hue, in

the early days of June, many battalions were sent in from Saigon to crack down on the insurgent people. Hue put up a grim resistance. Thousands of Buddhists altars together with pictures and statues of Buddha, incense burners and trays of offerings and candles were placed right in the streets. Thousands of people sat around smoke-shrouded altars. Meanwhile dozens of US planes roared past. American tanks rumbled into the city. They were stopped by the altars but soon tear gas and smoke grenades were used to chase the demonstrators away. Then the military vehicles smashed their way through, crushing a large number of altars. Many altars and images were confiscated and brought to the provincial governor's residence and the police headquarters. The Nguyen Dai Thuc Brigade and the Volunteers' Group of the students fought back for several days. The 100-day drive was temporarily crushed by force of arms.

Hue and the other towns in Central Viet Nam had set an example of courage and heroism. The South Vietnamese youth took Hue and Da Nang as models for it was in their streets that, for the first time, military vehicles and American offices were burned and the youth with arms in their hands had defended their right to live.

We can state confidently that one of the causes of the 1970-1971 mass movement was the effervescence of the 1966 break-away movement in the towns and cities of Central Viet Nam.

I considered it an honour to have joined in the students' protest. And so less than one year after my return to the country, I had been able to see for myself, in all its hideousness, the aggression of US imperialism and the humiliating dependence of the Saigon administration as well as the poverty of the masses and the dislocation of the social fabric brought about by this aggression. I openly approved of and responded to the struggle of the patriotic people and the unyielding youth and students of our country. During that 100-day turmoil I took part in many meetings with the students, now openly at teach-ins in the university, now clandestinely with only the leading members of the movement. At these secret meetings, policies and directions for action were worked out in detail. Among those attending were N.P., a leader of the medical students, N.T., a brilliant lecturer in philosophy of the Hue National College and also a poet and journalist, N.D.X., a student of the Faculty of Letters, head of the Volunteers' Group, about ten in all. Our place of meeting was a hut in a very remote place which we called "Tuyet Tinh Coc" (Break-away Cave). Was this name deliberately chosen by the student leaders to show their determination to definitely break away with the Thieu-Ky regime? Nobody cared to explain it but every one of us took delight in mentioning it. Now it is no longer necessary to keep the name secret. I took part in the movement as an adviser, not as a leader. But the Saigon regime mistook me for one of the leaders. That is why later on when they ordered

the arrest of eight leaders of the movement, I was also on the list.

The students, after many efforts, managed to bring out a paper which they named *Viet Nam! Viet Nam!* and proposed that I head the editorial board. That was a big task and also a great privilege that my young friends had reserved for me. I could not but accept it. The first issue carried many articles describing society since the illegal presence of the US in South Viet Nam and its brazen intervention in its internal affairs. Especially, the paper reprinted a number of documents of the anti-war movement in the United States and Western Europe which a West German professor of medicine named E.W. had been kind enough to supply to us. Hardly had half of the copies of the first issue of *Viet Nam! Viet Nam!* come off the press before we had to move the printing machine to my home in the university compound to avoid persecution. When I went to Saigon to give my routine lectures, I took one hundred copies of the paper with me. They were secretly passed round among the students in Saigon.

As the movement temporarily subsided, a terror campaign began with massive arrests. All the leaders of the movement went underground. I sought refuge in Saigon and stayed there three months. At the beginning of the new school year, in late autumn 1966, I returned to Hue and was immediately summoned to the interrogation bureau where they kept me for several days. It was there that the administration sorted out

the arrested people and put them to initial grillings were which in most cases more mental intimidation than actual physical torture. The small, cramped detention room accommodated ten people including some secondary-school teachers, a former head of a provincial information service and a former policeman, all connected with the break-away movement. There were also a boy of about 15 or 16 accused of moral depravity, a wealthy contractor and an old farmer. I was the last comer.

I was ordered by the police chief of Thua Thien-Hue to make a written statement of my activities in the period of the break-away agitation in Central Viet Nam. I admitted having taken part in the demonstrations of the patriotic people and students, and editing the magazine *Viet Nam! Viet Nam!* But I did not say a word about the "Break-away Cave" and those present at the secret meetings there.

They forced me to insert a phrase to prove how anti-communist a "nationalist intellectual" was. I did so unwillingly, and said to myself: "I don't mind being an anti-communist on paper as you force me to appear. But the day will come when I'll really be close to communism—you'll see!" Afterwards this thought kept on coming back to me.

After some days in the detention room of the interrogation bureau I came to know something about the state of affairs of my fellow-detainees. The wealthy contractor had been arrested just because

they wanted a ransom; the former head of the information service was a victim of factionalism. As for the boy, he was apprehended because he had stolen a few thousand piasters from his parents and squandered them away in restaurants and cafés out of boredom. Eventually, I also learnt that one of the secondary-school teachers was actually an underground militant of the National Front for Liberation. Yet the torturers at the interrogation bureau knew nothing about this, and finally had to release him. Lying on the cement floor of the detention room, I had plenty of time to ponder over this struggle and the men and women who had courageously stood up with youthful ardour. I came to realize that what I had done was nothing compared to their deeds, but I nevertheless took some pride in it because, to say the least, I had not been an onlooker in the national struggle. And I told myself that should another drive flare up in South Viet Nam cities, I would certainly be one of its followers. Screams of a tortured man came from the next room. We knew that this was only one of their many intimidation methods meant for us whom they had so far subjected to no physical torture. Ironically enough, these screams mingled with the mournful song of a soprano from a scratchy record-player of the gaolers. After I was supposed to have thought the matter over, the police chief summoned me and said : " Do you know the whereabouts of the student leaders of the break-away movement ? They are all in the mountains. You

have played into the hands of these Vietcongs. We will not keep you for long because we know you have been duped and have mistakenly let yourself be drawn into violence. Once out of here you should return to your university job, for if we see you again in a demonstration, we can no longer treat you as kindly as we are doing now ! "

Was it a threat ? No doubt. In fact, I did not know who were Vietcong among the leaders of the break-away movement. But I sympathized with them because they were good and gifted youths, students and intellectuals full of love for the country and people and eager to do something for the country and the nation. I had joined them because I had become more and more convinced that I ought to take sides with reason and justice, take sides with the broad masses of the people including the students and pupils. The intimidation of the Saigon administration carried no weight. Following the break-away spring of 1966, I readily identified myself with the movement for the safeguarding of national culture, which started in late summer 1966.

The Safeguarding of National Culture (1966-1967)

Less than a year after the American massive build-up in South Viet Nam, the cities took another completely different look. The decadent culture imported from the United States since the Diem period had found an ideal breeding ground. The

American way of life clashed with the national traditions in that it extoled violence, and appealed to the basest instincts of man in its emphasis on sex. It penetrated into South Viet Nam in the wake of the American GIs and soon became the vogue of a section of the Vietnamese youth who were drawn into a perverted mode of life which was also that of the mercenaries in the Saigon army. They never cared what their life would be like tomorrow because their future was gloomy and uncertain.

Magazines, films and photos, music and songs coming from the United States, Formosa and South Korea, were the usual means by which life became corrupted. After Diem's death, American films completely dominated the Southern cinema with the exception of a few films from Formosa, South Korea and Japan... Everyone, without exception, who worked in the field of culture recognized the corrupting effect of the American cinema. Cowboy films, murders, "sexy" scenes in a promiscuous atmosphere, night clubs .. Saigon cinemas all showed the same morbid films shot in Hollywood and did a roaring business with such temptingly titled films as "One car... Three Loves", "The Amorous Knight", "The Infernal Knight".. The film "Technique of a Murder" shown simultaneously in three theatres, was advertised in these words: "Thrilling manhunts, horrible executions where every gunshot kills a man... In each murder, he gets away with a big sum... 'Technique of a Murder' is an extraordinary gangster film which dwarfs every other gangster film in horror and ferocity..."

Music, songs and dance also had a corrupting influence. When the flood of GIs started coming, dance music and songs invaded the theatres, tea rooms and dancing halls, and "sex" meetings were held which would begin in a theatre with smutty songs and dances and end with an American-style party when everyone was sufficiently warmed up.

There was another way of "conditioning" people to accept this depraved culture: pornographic literature. Reviews and magazines flooded the sidewalks such as *Playboy* with its cover photos of naked women. These pin-ups were seen in barber's shops, cafés and noodle-soup stalls or concealed in school children's desks. Such novels as "*Bonjour Tritesse*!" and "*Un certain sourire*" by Françoise Sagan, "*Tobacco Road*" by Caldwell lay on the shelves next to novels by such scavengers as Chu Tu, Nguyen Thi Hoang, Nguyen Thi Thuy Vu, Tuy Hong... Pornographic literature invaded the army psywar service which up to then had relied on more openly anti-communist material. Social evils soon made their appearance. The number of hooligans, juvenile delinquents, prostitutes, cads, thieves and other evildoers increased to alarming proportions and soon Vietnamese "hippies" started to appear. The young victims of the "fury of living" launched disorganized movements aimed at getting rid of all ties and all morality. Soon groups sprouted up calling themselves "*Di Hoang*" (Aimless wandering), "*Bui Doi*" (Dust of Life), "*Cuop tinh yeu*" (Forcing Love). Depraved US culture was promoted by Washington

and Saigon to undermine the patriotism of those fighting against them. It triumphed for a time but only through the presence of the US expeditionary forces and the cultural policy of the Saigon administration which encouraged the introduction and free development of this way of life.

The movement against decadent culture became an urgent necessity. Though assuming the form of a cultural struggle, it was essentially a political one. Many South Vietnamese papers chiefly the mimeographed publications of the students and intellectuals, launched a drive against decadent culture. The *Tin Van* (Literary News) magazine, the *Hon Tre* (Soul of the Youth) and many other papers published a series of articles condemning the introduction of decadent culture, assessing its noxious effects and praising the traditional culture. Alongside the activities of the press, a series of organizations of a social, cultural and educational character came into existence, of which the most noted were the "Force to Safeguard the Morality of the Youth and Children", the "Association for the Protection of the Dignity and Interests of Women", the "Force to Safeguard the National Culture", each performing its own function. The "Force to Safeguard the Morality of the Youth and Children" set itself the task of combating juvenile delinquency, the "Association for the Protection of the Dignity and Interests of Women" combated prostitution and moral depravation among women and the "Force to Safeguard the National Culture" was mainly directed against depraved films and books and papers.

In April 1966, a conference of writers, artists, teachers and lawyers was held in Saigon. The participants approved a manifesto urging the Saigon administration to take measures against the decadent literature and art and to promote a progressive and healthy literature and art. Early in August, at the Saigon City Hall 500 delegates met to found the "Force to Safeguard the National Culture." Professor Le Van Giap delivered an important speech. The congress elected a presidium composed of about 25 members headed by Prof. Le Van Giap, a board of advisers and a secretariat with author Vu Hanh as Secretary General. I was also elected to the Board of Advisers. From mid-1966 to mid-1967, the "Force to Safeguard the National Culture" carried out intensive activities and organized many teach-ins under such themes as "What does national culture mean?" "Content, character and basis of the tradition of national construction and defence against foreign aggression," "Some manifestations of sexism and decadence in literature and art," "The role of teachers in the development of the spirit of the national culture," etc. The "Force to Safeguard the National Culture" sponsored some soirées where national songs, dances and music were performed. These shows always drew enthusiastic audiences. They warmly applauded such plays as *The Drumbeats of Ha Hoi*, *The Lam Son Uprising*, *The Ham Tu Quan Battle*, or dances like *Butterflies* and *Bees Teasing the Lion* and the drum and sword dances which express our pride in the glorious history of the nation. The "Force to Safeguard the National Culture" also sponsored the

Tin Van (Literary News) and the *Do Chieu* (pen-name of Nguyen Dinh Chieu, a renowned 19th-century poet and patriot – *Ed*) Publishing House. The *Tin Van* gradually roused up the national spirit of a number of intellectuals who had until then remained indifferent to the situation of the country and prompted them to take part in the battle to safeguard the national culture. The *Do Chieu* Publishing House had just brought out its first work (Ten Historic Songs) when it was closed down.

These old songs were very popular. Their authors, men like Luu Huu Phuoc, now a minister in the PRG, Mai Van Bo and Huynh Van Tieng, were no strangers to the Saigon administration. Their compositions praise national heroes of ancient times and the past war of resistance against the French and so were smacks in the face of the Americans and the Saigon administration. They are epic songs rousing the national feeling and calling the people to arms, songs which drowned the obscene and mad music which the enemy were encouraging.

I attended many teach-ins where I often took the floor. The audiences came from all social sections, mostly students, pupils and intellectuals. In my capacity as a member of the "Force to Safeguard the National Culture," I raised a number of problems relating to national culture in Hue and Saigon. Other members of the Force went to various provinces of the Mekong Delta. In mid-1967, I was invited to join the Presidium of the Force and entrusted with

organizing a branch in Hue. But repression descended on us before I could do anything. In August 1967, the "Force to Safeguard the National Culture" called its second convention to commemorate its first anniversary. Right after the Convention, a dozen important members of the Force were arrested including the president of the Presidium, Prof. Le Van Giap. He was many times put to "interrogation." Secretary General Vu Hanh was detained for three years without trial.

The movement momentarily receded to revive in 1969-1971 under other forms, chiefly among the students. The Saigon paper *Dan Chu Moi* wrote some pertinent remarks: "We must not forget that the aid granted by the US and amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars per year is mainly used for the purchase of armaments and subsidies to pen hirelings. It is in the nature of US aid that there is no subsidy for a healthy constructive culture. It can be said that now, seventeen years after the signing of the Geneva Agreements, South Viet Nam has not produced any cultural work comparable to those of the North. Honest artists whose hands are bound by censorship and feet shackled by heavy taxes (taxes on publications that illiterate imbeciles would levy at the same rate as on the ads of traditional pharmaceutical products) have done their best to create and to get things printed. They have made real efforts to develop the national traditions, especially the tradition of unyielding struggle."

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In the movement to defend the national culture, it is worth mentioning the exhibition held on the occasion of the centenary of Phan Boi Chau in Hue at the end of 1967. People were chafing under the repression by Thieu-Ky in autumn 1966. The youth decided to maintain the spirit of opposition by more cautious means than the riots of the previous year. We called on them to cooperate with us by collecting everything relating to Phan Boi Chau's life for a literary and historical display organized with the support of the Faculty of Letters. Many documents of the great patriot were found. His family had kept precious relics: manuscripts, photographs of the period from 1925 to 1940, etc. We made a display of about eighty of his greatest writings, including unpublished works. Books printed in North Viet Nam were exhibited with only a changed cover to prevent the curiosity of the local authorities. The display was a great success. It drew a large attendance especially of school and college students and educators. The Hue people had great respect for the late patriot. They wanted to know the organizers and make financial contributions to the exhibition. Every visitor received a 120-page anthology containing articles by various authors and a detailed bibliography of Phan Boi Chau. The book also carried an article by Hai Khach (pseudonym of the Northern historian Tran Huy Lieu) and a study by Chuong Thau, a specialist on Phan Boi Chau in the North.

We spunkily printed in the book the names of authors and works appearing in North Viet Nam since

1955. In the visitors' book, we found such entries as: "This exhibition has aroused the national sentiments and patriotism of the youth." We also held a ceremony commemorating the great patriot and a competition for the translation of one of his poems written in classical Chinese.

The exhibition had wide repercussions. The head and deputy-head of the province of Thua Thien-Hue visited it and wrote in the visitors' book words extolling Phan Boi Chau's patriotism and revolutionary sentiments. But of course, the secret agents kept their eyes skinned.

In the height of the repression against the movement to safeguard the national culture, that exhibition was like a challenge thrown at the rulers. A well-known intellectual in Saigon told me: "Under the present circumstances, that display shows the courageous attitude of the intellectuals and students in Hue."

What we had done was only the continuation of the work of the Movement of Defence: under all circumstances, the cultural workers must ensure the protection of the national patrimony and the spirit bequeathed by the previous centuries and, on behalf of the country and the people, fight all American attempts at corruption.

Spring of 1968

One afternoon in September 1967 I received the visit of a stranger. He was short and plump, simply

but neatly dressed. I had met him sometimes earlier but I could not place him. All I knew was that he was a secondary-school teacher. He took from his breast pocket a small roll the size of a chopstick and handed it to me. It was a letter without the name of either the sender or the addressee, and the content was only a few lines of inquiry after my health. But I could immediately recognize the handwriting. The teacher looked at me and said: "Someone has given me this letter for you."

Following the break-away movement in Central Viet Nam in the spring of 1966, the man who wrote me this letter and myself had gone underground to avoid persecution. His letter, in spite of the generalities, carried an obvious message.

I was happy to hear from my old friend, but could not help feeling some concern. However, when I saw the gentle look of my guest I felt reassured. He was the first to speak. He said he knew that I was an activist of the movement in spring 1966 in Hue, and also a patriotic intellectual and he wanted to make acquaintance with me to exchange views on the situation of the country. He then handed to me a typed copy of the Program of the South Viet Nam National Front for Liberation. For some time now it had been the talk of the whole of Hue city. I had listened to Radio Giai Phong but only occasionally and had been trying in vain to get more information about the Front's Program. Before taking leave, the teacher said: "I have read this program. I've been asked to pass it on, so I came here. See you again."

The interview lasted only about twenty minutes but it left me with deep impressions. I hastened to hide the Program to avoid trouble. Not until late at night when my family had gone to bed did I take the Program out to read. It made clear many things and especially with its analysis of the situation, it shed new light on the struggle of the South Vietnamese people. I read it again and again and found no point to which I could object. An independent, democratic, peaceful, neutral and prosperous South Viet Nam which would be peacefully reunited to the whole country, that was the ardent desire of everyone including the urban intelligentsia. Later I learnt that many other intellectuals in the cities had also received copies of the Program either directly or through an intermediary.

After the Front had published its Program, the intellectuals in South Vietnamese cities asked themselves what they should do to keep abreast of the developments. The Program had the effect of splitting their ranks. They could no longer remain indifferent, but had to make a choice. The point was how to respond to the proposal of the Front and what each of us intellectuals could do to do his bit for the common cause. The time had come for each of us to put this question to himself. We had had many years to realize the aggressive and traitorous character of the US and the Saigon quislings. Who had invited the Americans to commit troops to South Viet Nam? Who were Nguyen Van Thieu and Nguyen Cao Ky? Who had entitled these two mercenaries of the French

army to speak in the name of the South Vietnamese people? The answer had been given: it was the US and its agents that had provoked this war. Only by overthrowing the rule of the US and Thieu - Ky could there be independence, freedom, peace, welfare and happiness.

Some elderly intellectuals had taken part in the anti-French resistance. They had refused to co-operate with the Saigon administration since 1954. Throughout this period of time they had lain low and adopted a wait-and-see attitude. Now they wanted to contact the young intellectuals of the 30-35 age group to work out some plan of action. At the end of 1967, a university professor invited some of us to his home to discuss the founding of an organization of patriotic intellectuals in the cities. The meeting was organized very secretly under the guise of a soirée where we ate, drank and listened to music and eventually discussed our plan. We made our appraisal of the Program of the NFL and the situation of the country, and checked whether this program answered the needs of the time; in short, we reviewed the whole situation since Thieu and Ky came to power, assessed the Front's program and discussed the foundation of a political organization of the patriotic people of the middle classes in the cities. Some suggested that it be named "Forces Militating for Democracy and Peace." We were not satisfied with that name, but could not go on discussing. Afterward each of the group went to see prominent personalities, intellectuals, writers and artists, members of the national bourgeoisie, etc. Our plan met with favourable response from some in the

university and college teaching body. All of us who were canvassing for the new organization had good reasons to be optimistic. In general, we met patriotic-minded people who had wished to take some form of action but were still lacking an organization.

In the last days of 1967 and in early 1968, Hue was unusually busy adorning itself to welcome the new spring. Everyone felt something was imminent. We ourselves were fretting with an indescribable presentiment.

Hue on the approach of Tet of the year Mau Than. Streams of people flowed in and out of the city. There were big crowds coming from all the districts of Thua Thien province. The flower market on this side of the Trang Tien bridge was a real pageantry of colours, the yellow of the apricot flowers mingling with the crimson of the dahlias. Business looked much briskier than in the previous years. But all of us were far from anticipating that we were to witness an extraordinary Tet, a most stirring Tet, one that called back to mind the epic spring of 1789 when Emperor Quang Trung made a triumphal entry into the capital after routing the Tsing invaders.

Only four hours after the offensive started, in the small hours of the 31st day of January 1968, the revolutionary forces and the people had captured the city. The flag of the NFL fluttered on the flag tower in the citadel. The three-stripe flag of the quislings had been put down, while the flags of the NFL and the Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace Forces proudly flew over the offices. The Alliance launched

an appeal to the people to rise up to wrest back control of their beloved city, which had been occupied by the enemy for twenty-two years. Three days later, the Americans began a systematic bombing of the city. The revolutionary forces together with the Alliance held an emergency conference to consider measures to cope with the situation and founded a people's revolutionary administration to take charge of the management of the newly-liberated city and the defence of the people. On February 15, 1968, the Thua Thien — Hue People's Revolutionary Committee was founded and I was elected its chairman. Meanwhile, the fight of the Hue people continued to unfold in unbelievable conditions with many examples of noble self-sacrifice of the combatants and people and also many splendid expressions of the close and cordial ties between the army and people during the crucial moments. After holding their ground for twenty-three days, the revolutionary forces withdrew from the city to avoid the obliteration of Hue by US bombs and shells. On the road from the city to the liberated zone, I could see with my own eyes tangible evidence of US genocidal crimes. In the villages I passed through, like La Chu, Van Xa and Thanh Luong in Huong Tra district along Highway I, all that remained were scenes of desolation and devastation with innumerable bomb craters. Right in the city, the enemy had dumped fragmentation, incendiary, demolition, phosphorus and gas bombs on built-up areas. Tens of thousands of houses in Thua Thien-Hue had been razed to the ground, thousands of civilians killed or wounded. While still in

the city in the years following the massive introduction of US troops, I myself had not fully believed that the US was engaged in genocidal warfare, thinking that death and destruction were inevitable in war. Some people had even thought that "the other side" had inflated the crimes of the US for propaganda purposes. They had conceded that the arrival of US troops had brought about great upheavals in South Vietnamese society, that the US had corrupted the young generation of South Viet Nam with its decadent culture, but still could not bring themselves to believe that the US was bent on killing all and destroying all with bombs and shells. Now I could convince those sceptics that the US had done so. The genocidal crime of the US aggressors was a glaring reality. The word "genocide", which had been an abstract notion for the city-dwellers in South Viet Nam, now became a concrete fact to me as I watched the vegetation withered by toxic chemicals, the desolate countryside, the fields churned up by explosives, the forests burnt out by napalm and the bomb craters that evoked a lunar landscape. The crimes of the US are innumerable. Today world public opinion has many times raised an angry voice against them. Yet some Vietnamese still do not believe that the US is committing genocide. What a tragedy! How can you fight the enemy when you feel no hatred for them?

*

Once in the liberated zone I was happy to meet many acquaintances and old friends as well as

former students of mine. I also met and listened to some people freshly out of the Thua Phu prison in Hue city who related the atrocious prison regime they had had to endure month after month and year after year. The prison set up by the traitorous regime was a real hell on earth.

I also met the revolutionaries whom I had contacted during the days of bitter fighting in Hue city. They greeted me with open arms and an open heart and we were brought closer together by our common love for the country and the hatred for the Americans and their agents and in the exhilarating atmosphere of resistance against US aggression, for national salvation.

What particularly rejoiced me was that the revolution was on a powerful upswing and the cities in the South were seething with mighty militancy. After Hue, committees of the Alliance were founded one after another in Saigon, Da Nang and other cities. The Central Committee of the Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace Forces headed by Mr. Trinh Dinh Thao made an important contribution to the formation of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Viet Nam and the Advisory Council. Another event that always remains fresh in my mind was the visit to the North of a delegation of the Central Committee of the Alliance of which I had the honour to be a member. Our delegation had the honour to meet President Ho Chi Minh, the beloved and respected

leader of the people of Viet Nam, North and South. The intellectuals in South Vietnamese cities who in the dark years had turned their thoughts to the North, had eagerly listened to every word of the New Year messages of President Ho and secretly circulated his collection of poems *Prison Diary* — all wished to see him some day. I had this rare privilege and became even more deeply convinced that this great Communist was the true national leader in the fight against the French colonialists and US imperialists for national independence, peace, and the happiness of all future generations of our people. During my stay in the North I visited many places, met many intellectuals, researchers, writers and artists.

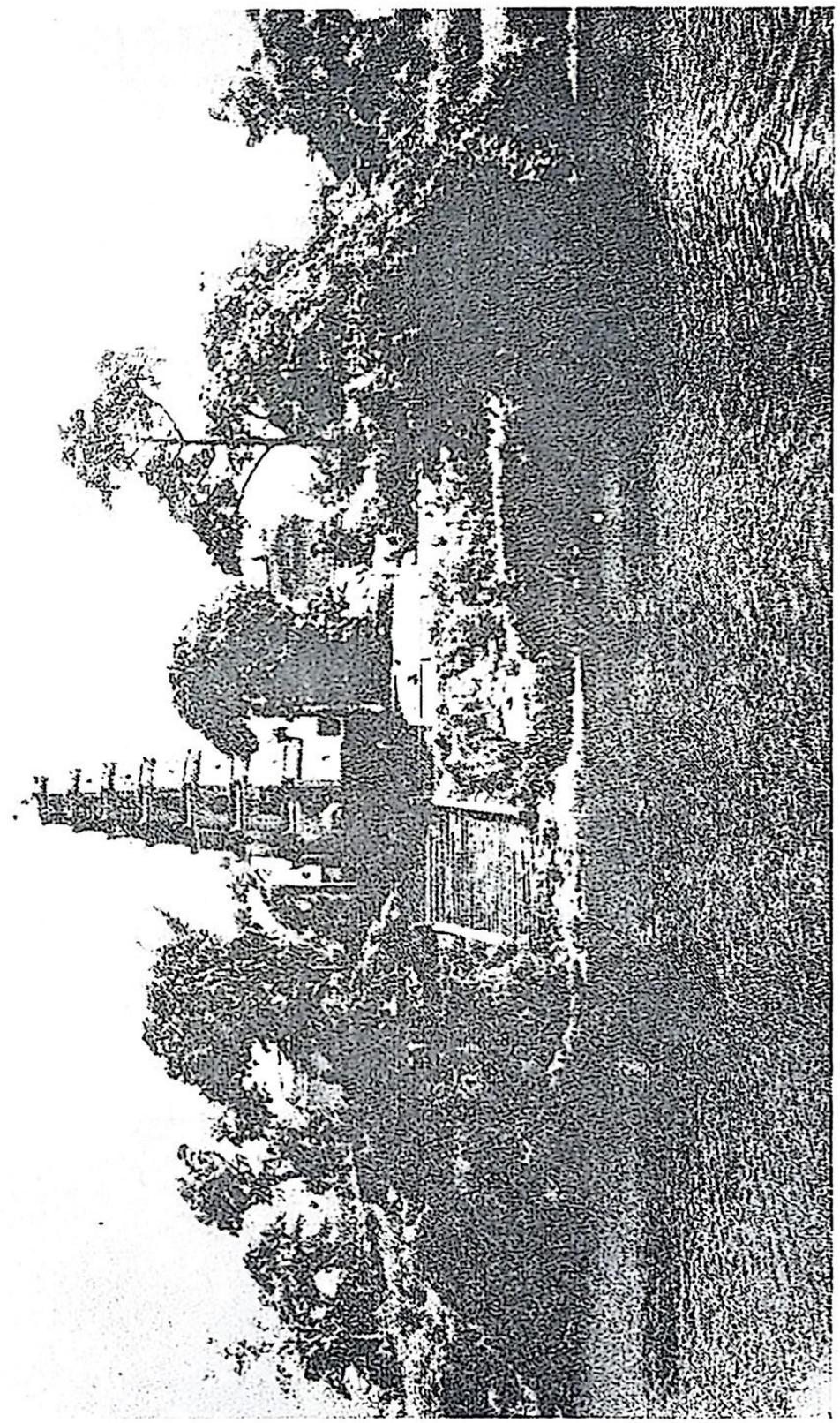
How inspiring was this atmosphere of independence and freedom !

The achievements of the North today are due to independence and freedom. To us these laconic words of President Ho Chi Minh have become all the clearer and more significant : "Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom." It is for nothing else that the South has for a dozen years now been fighting the aggressors.

Affer fifteen years' groping for the path back to the people, I have come to the revolution because only by siding with the revolution can one truly return to the people. The general offensives and uprisings in the spring of 1968 have ushered in a

new stage in the protracted and hard struggle of our nation and our people for independence and freedom, for the peaceful reunification of the country.

In order to bring closer the day of reunion of all families, the day of great victory of the nation, it is clear that much remains to be done and many more sacrifices and hardships must be endured. But, like all South Vietnamese, I believe that this grand day is not far off.



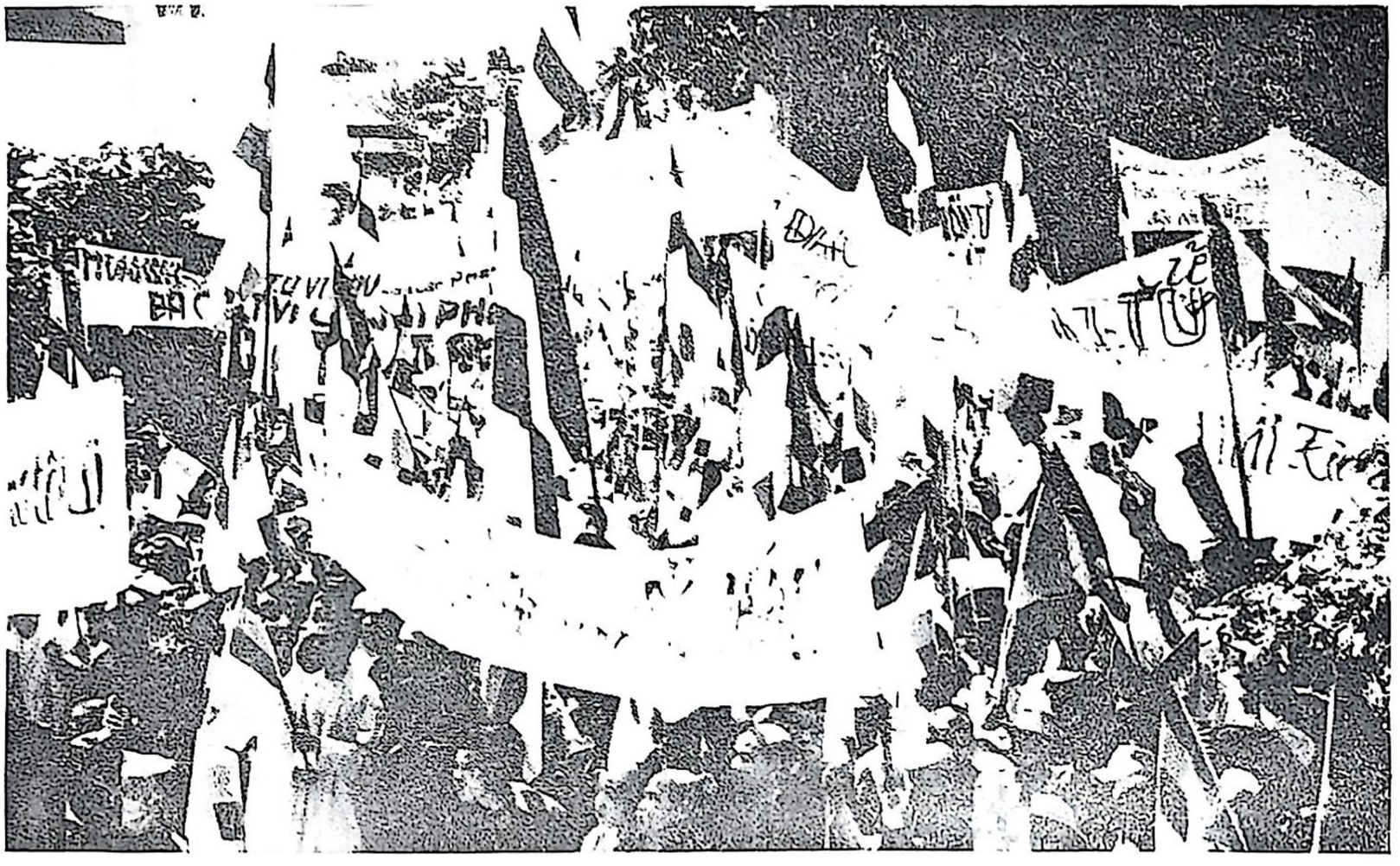
The Pagoda of the Heavenly Lady (Thiên Mu)

The Perfume River

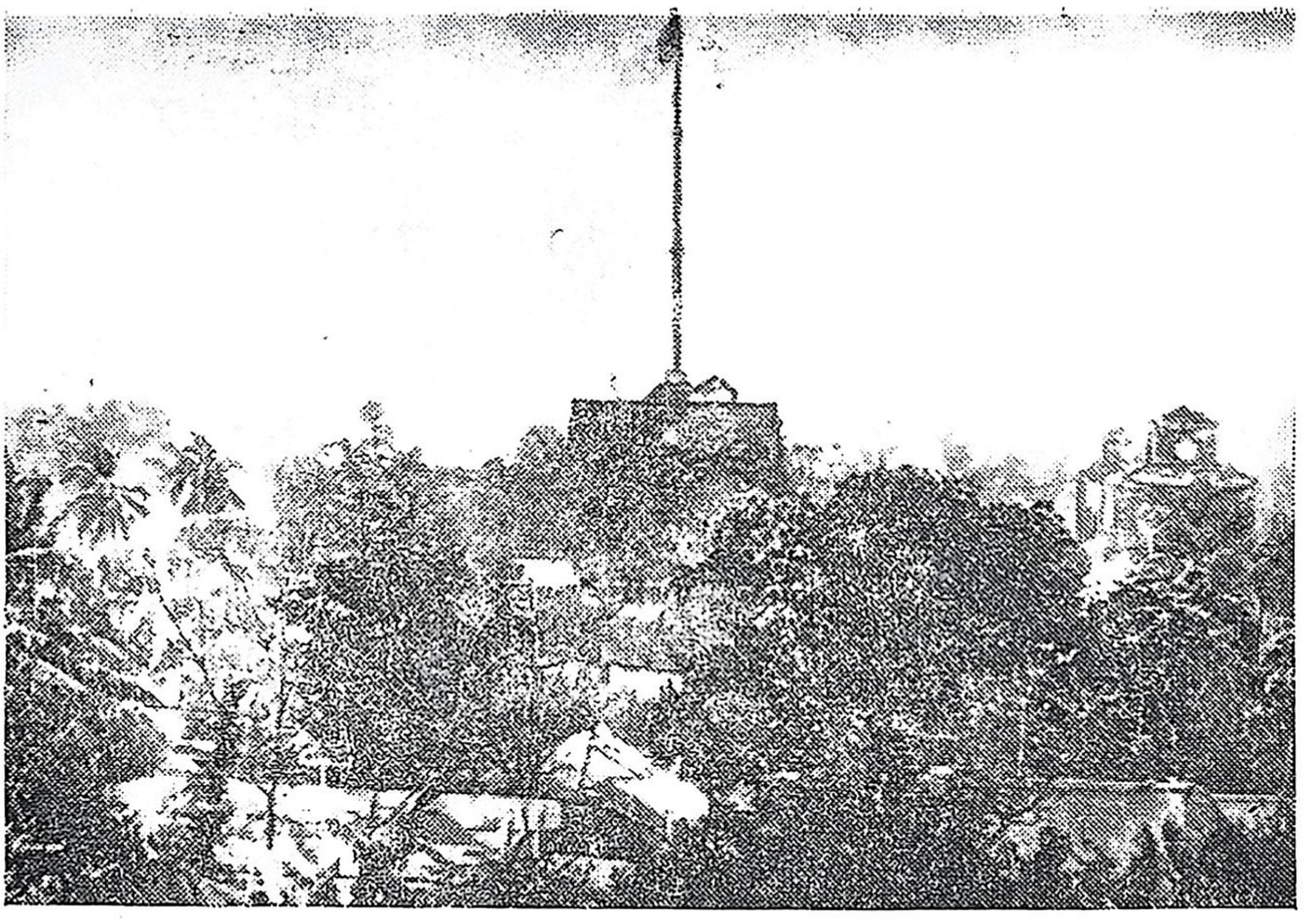
The Tomb of King Tu Duc

Hue during Têt 1968

Hue students taking to the streets



Buddhist demonstration in Hue



Têt 1968 : The NFL flag fluttering on the flag tower of the Citadel of Hue.

APPENDIX

HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON HUE AND THUA THIEN

Excerpts from Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi *(General Geography of Dai Nam) a treatise written between* 1864 *and* 1875 *on the orders of King Tu Duc. Dai Nam (Great Southern Country) was one of the former names of Viet Nam in use after* 1820

ROYAL COLLEGE (Quoc Tu Giam)

The Royal College is situated in the village of An Ninh, outside the Citadel (western part). Its front part is occupied by the Room of Ethics (1) and the back part by the Room of Conferences. To the right and to the left are the "students' quarters" built in the second year of Minh Mang's reign (1821). The staff consists of a Rector, two Vice-Rectors and two professors, who have under their command a Supervisor General, a secretary and a bursar.

NOTE

In the first years of Gia Long's reign, the College was headed by a Director of Studies assisted by two Vice-Directors

(1) *"Di luan duong"*, literally: unalterable rules on human behaviour.

(the first and second Vice-Director). In 1820, the first year of Minh Mang's reign, these names were replaced by the present titles. In the second year of Minh Mang's reign (1821) were built the Room of Ethics, the Lecture-room, the western and eastern quarters, each with three bays, for students from the royal family and the quarters for the College's students (Giam Sinh) *and the student sons of mandarins (*Am Sinh*), each one having nineteen bays. In the 19th year of his reign two great civilian mandarins were appointed to take charge of the management. In the reign of Thieu Tri, the Royal College was numbered among the capital's twenty landscapes, celebrated by the King in his "Collection of Royal Poems". One of these poems, entitled "The Voice Reading in the Study" was engraved on the stone stele set up in front of the Royal College. The third year of Tu Duc's reign (1850) witnessed the erection of quarters for the mandarins in charge of education on the right side of the College, each building with fifteen bays, and new rooms reserved for students of the College and student sons of mandarins, of nineteen bays each, were built. In the 7th year of his reign (1854) after visiting the College and inspecting the studies there, the King sent to the institution a letter and 14 poems with an introduction: all this was engraved on a stele set up in the stelae house on the left of the College.*

THE THUA THIEN MANDARIN COMPETITION CAMP

The camp is situated in the quarter of the Ninh Bac guild, inside the Citadel. In the middle is the Room of Competitions; in front of it, the House of the Central Crossroads; behind it, the Examiners' Hall with rooms to the right and left used for accommodating the mandarins entrusted with watching over the inner and the outer precinct. All around stand walls

of masonry. This camp is the site of provincial extraordinary competitions organized on the Emperor's special order.

NOTE

At the beginning of Gia Long's reign (1802—1820), the camp of competitions was installed in Doc So commune, north of the Capital. At the beginning of Minh Mang's reign (1820—1840) the camp was shifted to the commune of Nguyet Bieu. The buildings were made of bamboo covered with leaves, and used to be dismantled when the competitions were over. At the beginning of Thieu Tri's reign (1841—1847) the camp was moved back to its present site and buildings erected in masonry.

CLIMATE

The temperature is generally mild throughout the year. Peach trees blossom at the beginning of spring. In the first and the second lunar months, the temperature is mild and pleasant; the spathes of arecas start bearing inflorescenses. As a popular saying goes, it is the time of "the wind that swells the spathes of the arecas". In the third month, the heat gradually increases with, at times, sudden gales from the south, called "southern storms" — against which precautions should be taken by travellers on rivers and at sea. In the 4th month, with the "starting of growth" period (1) there are floods in some years. In the 5th, 6th and 7th months, the southern monsoon becomes

(1) One of the 24 divisions of the year defined by the position of the earth in relation to the signs of the Zodiac.

more violent. Before the 7th day of the 7th month, it rains frequently ("rains washing the chariots" as the popular saying goes). In the 8th and 9th months, the temperature grows gradually cooler, with torrential rains and from time to time east winds called "coastal winds' blow uninterruptedly for two or three days. The 10th month often brings floods to the whole country on the 3rd, 13th and 23rd days. As the common saying goes: "At the very moment you think you are saved, a new misfortune turns up : here comes the flood of the 3rd day of the 10th month". When the waters withdraw, the "rains washing the mud" fall.

In winter, drizzles fall, called "ash-rain" on account of the colour of the water.

During the year, a great quantity of rain falls in the latter half of autumn and at the beginning of winter, whereas the weather is very sunny in the second half of spring and the period following it. After the 11th month (the 2nd month of winter) it is a little cool, the trees keep their leaves. By the end of the year, it is already mild; in the 12th month, the thunder starts to roar.

Each year contains two seasons in which rice is grown. Summer rice is transplanted in the 10th month and harvested in the 3rd month and autumn rice is transplanted in the 5th month and harvested in the 8th month. If the floods come early, in the 7th and the 8th month, the rice crop is lost, that is why autumn is nicknamed the season of the "bet with Heaven."

The nine districts of the Highlands are in the most part covered by forests and mountains. There is only one season when it is possible to cultivate. And so we see that climate has a decisive influence on farming.

CUSTOMS AND HABITS

Thua Thien is the land best endowed by nature in the whole country. This is why its cultural life becomes every day more developed; boorish manners give way to politeness and social life engenders affection. Good manners have always ruled this memerous population, the scholars devote themselves to study, the people to farming, weaving and various handicrafts. Techniques are advanced and culture is flourishing.

Customs concerning marriage and death draw their inspiration from the book "Chu Van Cong's familial Rites". (1) On New Year's Day, boys and girls dressed in beautiful clothes will first come and prostrate themselves before the altar of their ancestors, then go and offer New Year greetings to the elder members of the family. During the first three days of Tet, friends and acquaintances will visit each other and exchange good wishes. On the 5th day of the 5th month three-cornered rice cakes and water melons are presented as offerings to the spirits of the

(1) A Chinese classic which lays down the rites to be observed in civil life.

ancestors. Mugwort (*cây ngai*) is woven into the form of a tiger and hung on the door of the house as an amulet. Various leaves and herbs are picked and made into a kind of tea (called "fifth-day tea").

In the seventh month, votive objects are burnt in honour of the ancestors' spirits. On the last night of the year, a *nêu*, a long bamboo pole with a lamp and fireworks hanging from the top, is planted in the yard. The *neu* is only removed on the seventh day of the first lunar month.

Each village has a *dinh*, the commune's cult house where the cult ceremonies are celebrated in spring and autumn. On the fifteenth day of the first, seventh and tenth months (*Tam nguyên* : three days of prime importance) every family presents offerings to the ancestral spirits. These customs and habits have remained almost unchanged ever since ancient times.

In the district of Quang Tri and the regions lying near the mountains, the land is for the most part arid. The coastal regions are sandy. Here the people usually live sparingly and keep away from luxury. The manners and customs, feast days and the lives of the scholars are all nearly the same as in Thua Thien, with this difference that power is for the most part in the hands of evil, quarrelling notables who rule over the villages and hamlets. The majority of the population live by rearing silk worms and weaving; they are laborious and intent on their work and do not like artifices of the spirit. At the beginning of spring, an officiant is invited

to present offerings to the spirits and solicit their protection (specifically that of the Soil Genie). In the middle of the year, the whole village gather to present their offerings to the Genie — usually the founding Genie of the village — to prove that they still remember their origins. It is a good custom, the custom of a people who loves peace and concord. As for the highlanders who live scattered in the nine districts of the Highlands and Midlands, their customs and habits are boorish and backward ; however they are mild and submissive and easily ruled over.

HAI VAN PASS. (Mountain of the Clouds over the Sea or Mountain of the Cloud Pass)

This mountain is situated in the south-east of Phu Loc between the district of Thua Thien and the province of Quang Nam : the northern part of the pass lies in Phu Loc (Thua Thien district) and its southern part in Hoa Vang (Quang Nam province). A wooden tablet bearing an inscription was formerly set on a polished stone as a boundary marker.

To the west of Mount Hai Van lies Mount Ba and to the east, Mount Hai : these three mountains are close to each other, their summits are hidden by clouds and their feet reach as far as the sea — even plunging into the water. The road, bordered by thick-leaved, giant trees, bends sharply and zigzags nine times before climbing up to the pass. The slope is steep ; to climb it travellers must be as

agile as monkeys or fly like birds. Five streams spring from this mountain : Ky Spring, Vu Spring, Tigers and Wolves Spring, Small Spring and Big Spring.

At the northern foot of the mountain near the shore there is the Bats' Cave and the Burning Beach where, according to a legend spirits rouse up the waves and sink junks sailing by. A popular song says : " Travellers on foot dread the Hai Van Pass and sailors dread the waves set loose by the spirits of the Bats' Cave ".

In Minh Mang's reign (1820-1840) a military post was set up at the pass of Mount Hai and two military posts at Mount Hai Van. Blocks of stone were laid as steps to facilitate the crossing and the highest peak in the middle was called the Peak of Calmness. A road running near this peak leads to Quang Nam province ; this road is now blocked and a watch post has been set up there. During an inspection tour in the province of Quang Nam, King Hien Tong (1) crossed the Hai Van Pass and described the landscape in the following quatrain :

This steep pass of Viet Nam
Recalls the road leading to the land of Thuc (2)
Clouds obstruct the three high mountains
The traveller feels like being stranded in the sky.

(1) Posthumous title of the lord Nguyen Phuc Chu known as Chu Quoc (1691-1725).
(2) A remote mountain province in China.

THE FALL OF THE CAPITAL

On the night of July 4-5, 1885, the regent Ton That Thuyet attacked by surprise the French garrison of Mang Ca, but failed. At dawn, the French counter-attacked and occupied Hue. For three days on end, French soldiers killed and pillaged. Each family in Hue lost one or several of its members, either killed in combat or massacred. Those tragic events are recounted in this famous *ve*, the *ve* being a popular poem telling about topical events, often tinged with satire.

Below are extracts from this 3,000-line poem.

The Lord Marshal (1), *once his decision taken,*
Returned home and told his father :
" Father, come what may !
" They want to compromise, I don't.
" At the Court, both the civilian and military mandarins
" Seek to make peace with the enemy.
" Everything has been agreed :
" Ten thousand taels of silver and ten thousand taels of gold have been sent over.

(1) Regent Ton That Thuyet.

"How I hate the Tây (1), *those barbarians*
"Who demand gold and silver and do us harm even in our own homes!
"Father, I wish to inform you:
"Either life or death, but we must fight!
"Otherwise, the Tây *will make light of our heroes.*
"How I hate those officials at the Court who hold such cowardly views!
"Father, I wish to inform you;
"I've picked the time, the night of the 22nd (2).
"Everything is ready on the military side.
"There will be no moon on the 23rd.
"Father, your hair is white like silk,
"Your cheeks are wrinkled, you've lost your teeth,
"And I haven't done anything for you yet.
"But once I have recaptured the citadel,
"You'll be rewarded with a commendation from the King
"Written in red letters and stamped with a golden seal."
The Lord Marshal's father said, crying:
"If I were not so old and weak,
"I would gladly join a soldiers' column.
"If one does not go and fight now,
"Once peace has come, what will one fight for?"
Father and son having settled their affairs,
The army quickly withdrew by the road.
Officers, soldiers, servants,
Holding lanterns went to Hau Bo (3)
Foot and horse in immense numbers.

(1) Derogatory name for French colonialists.
(2) 22nd day of the fifth lunar month of the year *At Dau* (July 4-5, 1885).
(3) Ammunition depot, behind the Royal Citadel.

Shrines and temples: here was our Capital!
May the Genies of Heaven and Earth
Help us to recover Tran Binh (1)*!*
Alone of the Court's six ministries and many departments,
The Lord Marshal was there with his officers.
His army was ready
To smash the French-held fort.
Officers of all ranks
Volunteered to go in the vanguard.
At the second watch (2), *the rice was cooked,*
The streets were silent.
At the third watch, the troops were arrayed,
At the fourth, the order was given to attack.
Our guns were firing fiercely
But the French (3) *ate and drank and refused to go out of Tran Binh.*
Our guns were firing quite far,
Even beyond Tien Non (4), *but they harmed the people.*
The cannon-balls flew high and low
And even reached Bao Vinh (5).
It was a thousand pities that the people suffered so much!
Innocent victims of our own stray projectiles.
One heard sobs and laments.
The night was pitch-dark, it was impossible to see one's way.

(1) A fort.
(2) 10 p. m. July 4, 1885.
(3) 900 French soldiers had come from the North (Tonkin) the day before.
(4) Hamlet on the bank of the Perfume river.
(5) A village near the Mang Ca fort.

People were crying and wailing,
Children were leading mothers, mothers carrying babies.
Money and wealth were thrown away like water;
Provided Heaven let us live, we could make more.
Even the poultry were to be pitied!
They ran about, terrified.
As for people, some hid in bushes,
Others waded through ponds,
Carrying relatives on their backs.
The confusion lasted all through the night.
People tried to escape from French projectiles,
Mothers and children rushed about in the dark,
Like fish in a puddle.
May the genies of Heaven and Earth,
Help us to retrieve Tran Binh, and peace.
The rich buried gold and silver.
Some hid pots and pans, others strings of coins.
"Later, when peace comes,
"We'll retrieve them from the caches."
Even the wealthy were in dire straits;
What to say of that blind fortune-teller (1) *groping his way!*
Second watch: the night was pitch-dark.
Fourth watch: the moon rose behind the clouds.
Fifth watch: the French guns fell silent.
News came that we had got the better of them.
But then they attacked with land mines
And stormed Truong Dinh: many of us died.
We ran short of ammunition,

(1) Fortune-tellers are usually blind people.

And the Duke (1) *was so informed.*
But he grew angry and said:
"What do I know about guns and ammunition?
"Go to Hau Bo,
"Inform the Lord Marshal, let him try to find some.
"Now I am like a stray bird,
"We win, I stay; we lose, I leave."
Then he ordered his troops
To carry him away in a palanquin escorted by lancers.
His soldiers and servants thronged the road.
He went to the Royal Palace,
Where kneeling down, he entreated the King: (2)
"The battle will last a long time yet.
"Let me escort Your Majesty out of the palace.
"From every side, bullets are flying like arrows,
"How can we leave you here?"
The King shed abundant tears,
And prayed to the Heavenly Emperor (3)
To help us recapture Tran Binh
And bring peace to the country.
He had barely reigned two winters,
And here his throne was already in danger!
All these hardships and dangers
Were due to the French invaders.
Then he ordered that the Sword, Book and Seal (4)

(1) Nguyen Van Tuong, one of the highest-ranking mandarins at the Court.
(2) King Ham Nghi (enthroned in 1883).
(3) The king's powers were supposed to come from a Heaven's mandate.
(4) Royal insignia.

Be with him for this battle.
In the present trials for the State
He had known no glory yet, only miseries.
Let the Loan Nghi prepare parasols and palanquins,
The Cam Y and Loan Gia the throne,
The Vo Bi, Thi Ve, Thuong Tra, together with the Kim Ngo
Look after the protection of the three Queens. (1)
Foot soldiers and cavalry went in long columns.
The Commanders of the Rear and the Right Wing were also there (2).
When they reached the Right Gate,
The French guns boomed thunderously.
Wails and laments were heard.
Hens cackled, dogs barked, it was like a disturbed beehive.
The King shed abundant tears.
How could one anticipate such dangers for the throne?
At the Ke Van (3) *ferry,*
Troops and officers just waded across.
As soon as they passed the Church (4)
It became clear that the Duke was hand in glove with the French.
"Let Your Majesty take refuge here," he said,
"And let these days of combat pass."
The Commander of the Right Wing having heard this,
Drew his sword and pointed it at the traitor.

(1) The mother and two wives of King Tu Duc, King Ham Nghi's uncle, who died without progeny.
(2) Nguyen Hanh and Ho Van Hien.
(3) Ferry crossing the Kim Long river.
(4) The Kim Long church.

"Cam Y," he ordered, "escort the King away!
"He has now escaped from the Citadel;
"For him to enter the Church is like surrendering to the enemy."
The Duke, hearing this, was terrified,
And took refuge in the Church.
The Commanders of the Rear and the Right Wing were in a quandary.
Of the courtiers none was left to accompany the King.
Having gone as far as Thien Mu (1) *and Cho Mai* (2)
They turned to look at the devastated palaces.
Ah! All these trials and hardships
Were due to the French invaders.
The King asked everyone to do his best.
Kneeling down, the Right-Wing Commander said:
"Let Your Majesty be reassured.
"Now we are out of the range of the guns.
"Let us try to find some shelter first."

*
* *

Enemy pressure had slackened.
But at the hour of the Snake (3), *the French came and hoisted their flag.*
In the capital, confusion and bewilderment reigned.
After four hours of battle, people were exhausted.
Fires were raging from the New Market (4) *on.*

(1) The Pagoda of the Heavenly Lady, 3 kilometres from Hue, on the left bank of the Perfume River.
(2) A market near the above Pagoda.
(3) From 9 to 11 a.m.
(4) Now the Dong Ba market.

Both sides of the streets were devastated.
The fires even reached the Thua Thien prefecture
And the streets were a shambles on both sides.
The enemy had taken the capital and burnt people to death.
They had set fire to the Long Vu and Tuyen Phong barracks. (1)
All the people suffered grievously:
" They have burnt down our homes and are seeking to harm us."
From the Interior Ministry to the War Ministry,
The people fled and dispersed.
Nothing was left of the destroyed homes,
Their inhabitants fled to the countryside for fear of the French guns.

*
* *

The Lord Marshal went out by the Main West Gate,
Where General Ngo and General Soan behaved like heroes,
Striking right and left for all they were worth.
But Heaven was bent on their ruin.
General Soan rushed about on his horse,
Stopped his troops and arrayed them at Anh Danh. (2)
What talent, what courage he displayed!
The French resisted and they fought on the road.
General Ngo, on his horse and spear in hand,
Cut the enemy down who tried to flee.
But all had fled from the Capital

(1) Within the walls of the Citadel.
(2) Anh Danh crossroads, within the Citadel.

Soldiers, officers, even the King himself.
Who was left to look after the people?
Even in the glorious past, how many good mandarins were there?
Tears were running down the Lord Marshal's face!
" I had hoped," he said, " by attacking,
" To recapture Tran Binh and bring peace to the country.
" I admit my guilt, Your Majesty.
" Please judge my case and give me a fair trial.
" I bow my head before the Court,
" Return my mandate and surrender myself to you.
" Temples and shrines have been devastated
" I deserve to have my head cut off and exposed.
" I have reported the situation,
" Let me kill myself.
" The enemy have captured the capital,
" I feel humiliated before the Catholics (1) *and the French.*
" Having met with misfortune,
" If I returned to the Palace, I would be exposed to their scorn."
Hardly had he finished talking to the King,
When his father came from behind a hill.
" Thank Heaven, he said, " here you are, Father!
" I had feared you might fall into the hands of some traitor.
" After weighing the pros and cons,
" I think we should take refuge in the mountains.
" The main thing is for us to serve the King,
" This is the way loyal and valiant men leave their names to posterity.

(1) In a xenophobic spirit, the Nguyen Court practised an anti-Catholic policy.

"Now that the French have taken the capital,
"We must go with our legitimate sovereign and thus preserve our reputation.
"Those of you who have neither wife nor children
"May go home to settle their family affairs.
"Those of you who still have mother and father,
"May go home to care for them.
"As for me, Father,
"Filial piety is held dear in my heart, duty engraved in my mind.
"In order loyally to serve my King,
"It matters little that the sky is high, the ocean vast, the jungle immense,
"I must go."

Translated from the Vietnamese by D.T.B.

THE ROYAL TOMBS IN HUE

No foreigner or no Vietnamese living in another province is likely to miss visiting the tombs of the Nguyen kings, vestiges of Vietnamese 19th-century art, if he passes through Hue. The pilgrimage is not a short one for this is a real necropolis and very extensive. A few figures taken from the September 12, 1933 ordinance issued by Bao Dai, the last Nguyen king give some idea of it:

King Gia Long's Tomb	2,875 ha (circuit 11,234.40 metres.)
King Minh Mang's Tomb	475 ha
King Thieu Tri's Tomb	475 ha
King Tu Duc's Tomb	225 ha

While there was no limit to the size of royal tombs, feudal legislation imposed rigorous and detailed regulations on the building of other tombs:

— for princes and princesses of the blood or first-grade mandarins, maximum circuit (I *bo* equals about 0.7m)	360 *bo*
— 2nd-grade mandarins	320 *bo*
— 3rd-grade mandarins	280 *bo*
— 4th-grade mandarins	240 *bo*

— 5th - grade mandarins	200 *bo*
— 6th - grade mandarins and below	80 *bo*
— simple subjects	36 *bo*

The Royal Tombs are all located south of the town of Hue. Those of Gia Long and Minh Mang are on the right bank of the Perfume River, those of Thieu Tri, Tu Duc, Khai Dinh and others are on the left bank. Two of these tombs are typical and worth visiting thoroughly, that of Gia Long which is characterized by a majestic simplicity harmonizing with a picturesque landscape and that of Tu Duc, famous for its many palaces, temples, kiosks, lakes and gardens.

Unlike the kings of the former dynasty, the Lê, whose mortal remains had been buried at Lam Son (Thanh Hoa) in simple tombs made of stone or bricks, the Nguyen kings had their sepulchres built during their own lifetimes. In so doing they were inspired by the old popular belief that a dead man's soul was still living on in the other world, that it should be taken care of, presented with gifts and protected against evil genies, and that therefore his corpse should be kept in the immediate neighbourhood so as to ensure an everlasting memory. Hence, each tomb usually consists of three main structures: one is dedicated to the dead king's memory with his high deeds engraved on a stone stele, another is dedicated to his soul, with an altar on which are placed the funeral tablet and his familiar belongings and the third is for his remains. Each of these monuments is enclosed by one or two enceintes.

GIA LONG'S TOMB

Nguyen Anh was descended from those Nguyen lords who had been the true rulers of the country in the second half of the 16th century, under the Later Lê dynasty. In 1802, he ascended the throne and took the regal name of Gia Long. In 1820 he died and was buried in the tomb he had ordered built in 1814.

Gia Long's tomb is situated 14 km south of Hue. After crossing the ferry, the traveller arrives at a road junction where stand two houses, formerly the lodgings of the mandarins and soldiers appointed to look after the tombs. The mandarins who were chosen from among members of the royal family, would live most of the time in Hue and only occasionally visit their houses by the tombs. The troops in charge of the tombs were recruited from the people of Tong Son, the home district of the Nguyen family, and consisted of many groups of 30 men, the first of which was entrusted with the guarding of Gia Long's tomb.

The *Minh Thanh* temple is dedicated to the cult of King Gia Long and his first wife Queen Thua Thien Cao. It is erected on Mount Bach (White Mountain), one of the 14 peaks "guarding" the right side of the King's mausoleum. It is composed of two groups of buildings with double roofs: a main building 22.2 m long and 14 m wide and an antechamber of equal length and 7.6m in breadth. At the centre of the antechamber hangs a lacquered and gilt board bearing the temple's name and the

date of its construction: "The 14th year of Gia Long's reign (1815), one propitious day". At the end of the central structure, in a big sculptured recess, adorned with lacquer and gilt and shut off by brocade curtains, are placed the funeral slabs of the King and the Queen, bearing their respective posthumous ritual titles. In the two rooms are kept all the ritual pieces of furniture: offering tables, some of them richly sculptured, chairs, stools, a desk for reading out the offering formula, trestles, plank beds, candlesticks, incense-burners etc... There are huge antique candlesticks, a tripod for holding basins, and an old-fashioned stove. The main pieces of the woodwork rest on curiously designed plinths, and the panelling is covered with sculptured motifs. These sculptures like those of *Thoai Thanh* temple which are of the same style, are good examples of the style of wood-carving in the time of Gia Long (beginning of the 19th century). It is said that formerly many things belonging to Gia Long were preserved in *Minh Thanh* temple, including clothing, a war helmet, a belt, a saddle, swords, etc...

In front of the temple is a paved yard 26.6m long by 27 metres wide with an alley down the middle paved with brown stones and leading to a staircase adorned with dragons. On either side of the yard, there are two houses used as storerooms. That on the right (to the west) contains a beautifully sculptured plank-bed, an altar for the cult of the Earth Genie and an enamelled earthenware pot adorned with motifs in

relief. At the entrance, the yard is closed by a gate with three bays, forming a very elegant two-storeyed pavilion of 12.6 by 6 metres, with carved panels and ornamental designs in the same style as those inside the temple.

This gate opens onto an impressive view over the mountains.

Leaving the gate, three staircases with dragon-shaped banisters lead down to two grand courts, one 20 by 49 metres and the other 12 by 6 metres, enclosed by low walls. These are thirteen steps higher than the outside road and the large pool extending beside it. In one of these courts, the visitor's attention is attracted by a brass brazier. The outer walls of the *Minh Thanh* temple and its adjuncts form a rectangle 102 metres in length and 19 metres in breadth.

Walking to the left, round the base of the Minh Thanh temple, we arrive at Gia Long's sepulchre. The high walls of the enceinte with their grand courts rising harmoniously in tiers within their lush green frame make for majestic grandeur.

At the very bottom, on the edge of the pond, lies the *funeral court* 49 metres along the front and 23 metres deep paved with iron-grey flagstones. Some coarsely wrought stone statues are seen there: two elephants 1.76 metres high, two saddled horses 1.15 metres high and 10 civil and military mandarins 1.55 metres high.

The pond extends in front of the funeral court and is in the symbolic shape of a crescent. Access is by 7.7 metre-broad stairs adorned with dragons.

Above the funeral court rise six tiered terraces with a 44.7 metre frontage and 6.5 metres in depth, all flagged, and enclosed on two sides by low walls. Each has three staircases framed by dragons and snakes coiling beside the edge of the steps. The highest courtyard is called *Bai Dinh*, " the court where prostrations are performed " — to pay homage to the dead.

From the front, only the tomb's enceinte can be seen which is entered through a gate with double brass panels.

To reach the tomb itself, the visitor has to go up through the courtyards on the left hand side and climb up the outside hill of the tomb till he reaches the back of the mausoleum which dominates the whole structure. There he can gain a view of the whole construction : in the foreground, the two cenotaphs with their dark surrounding walls framed by green vegetation on two sides; and in the distance, the mountains. The austeres implicity of the royal sepulchre matches the complete calmness of surrounding nature.

Looking from behind the mausoleum, Gia Long's sepulchre is on the left and that of his first wife on the right.

The two cenotaphs of equal size are two blocks of masonry made of large stones and covered by masonry roofs which are part of the body of the tomb. Its shapes, reminding one of a hut, is quite exceptional in the region. In front of each cenotaph there is a marble altar behind a broad screen. The

whole structure is surrounded by a first enceinte 30 by 24 metres and 3.16 metres high pierced by one door covered by a screen, and then a second enceinte 40 by 31 metres and 3.6 metres in height containing the brass double-panelled gate already mentioned when describing the front. The mausoleum has been hewn into the side of a hill which is called *Chanh Trung* or " True Centre ". The earth is kept back 6.4 metres from the second enceinte by a masonry wall shaped like a horseshoe 123 metres long and 3.3 metres in height at the back, the two ends gradually sloping downwards.

According to the annals, the king himself rode over on an elephant to examine the area and choose the place where his mausoleum was to be built.

When standing behind the tomb and looking along its axis, the visitor sees in front of him a mountain in the distance crowned by a clump of scattered pines : it is Mt. *Thien Tho*.. Two masonry towers about fifteen metres high mark it from a long way off. The idea was that these pylons attracted propitious geomantic influences on the dead ruler while driving away harmful influences. Mount *Thien Tho* rises amidst a host of mountains : 14 on the right, 14 on the left and 6 behind. On one of them is erected the *Minh Thanh* temple and on another, the *Stele Pavilion*.

The park is watered by two streams : the first of these, called *Ho dai* or Long Lake, collects all the water flowing down the left slope of the tomb, and then makes a detour to pass in front of the cenotaph

where it widens into a half-moon in front of *Minh Thanh* temple. Doubling back on itself it passes in front of the tomb of Gia Long's second wife, and reaches the square tank facing the tomb of Gia Long's mother, finally arriving at the stupa of his sister. Thus it connects all the members of the royal family, before passing through the *Moi Khe* sluice to mingle with the second stream. The latter stream called *Truong Phong* stream springs from Mt. Nhue flows around Mt. Thien Tho and along the Truong Phong tomb on its right then, after describing a half circle, joins the "Long Lake".

From the funeral court, heading eastwards through a little frequented path the visitor reaches the higher basements of the *Stele Pavilion* built on *Thanh Son* (Blue Mountain).

First comes a monumental staircase with 14 steps, 6 metres in width, flanked by brisk-looking dragons. The first court is 36 metres long and 7 metres wide; the second one is 24 by 30 metres. Lastly we reach the esplanade of the *Stele Pavilion* (Bi Dinh) which is a level area of 42 by 30 metres. The esplanade and the courts are surrounded by low walls and connected with one another by stairs with dragon-adorned banisters.

The pavilion, a graceful though somewhat bulky structure under its double roof, stands in a grove of pine trees. It shelters the stele which is one of the smallest adorning the royal tombs: only 2.96 metres in height and 1.05 metres in breadth on a foundation 1.95 metres wide and 1.55 metres in depth, the whole made

of grey marble and ornamented with fine sculptures. On the stele are gilded inscriptions.

On the left of the *Stele Pavilion* stands the altar of the Earth Goddess. It is a mound of earth, 6 metres square, surrounded by walls, with a raised foundation in the middle, on which is erected the stele bearing the spirit's name.

Thus, the main elements of a royal tomb in the Hue area are scattered over many hills: a temple dedicated to the cult of the dead king with a funeral court, the tomb proper and the stele pavilion.

Gia Long's tomb is also surrounded by those of his mother, his two wives and his elder sister.

TU DUC'S TOMB

Tu Duc's tomb, also called *Khiem Lang*, is situated 7km from Hue, on the right of the Nam Giao road. It is surrounded by a thick wall weaving up and down as it follows the undulations of the land.

In fact, it is a large, spacious park with an area of over 400 ha. which contains not only all the components of a royal tomb as described above, but also all the buildings of a royal dwelling place. Tu Duc was childless. He had adopted three of his nephews and wanted to pass on his throne to one of them, and retire, at the right moment, to Khiem Lang. But his death in 1883 prevented him from carrying out these wishes.

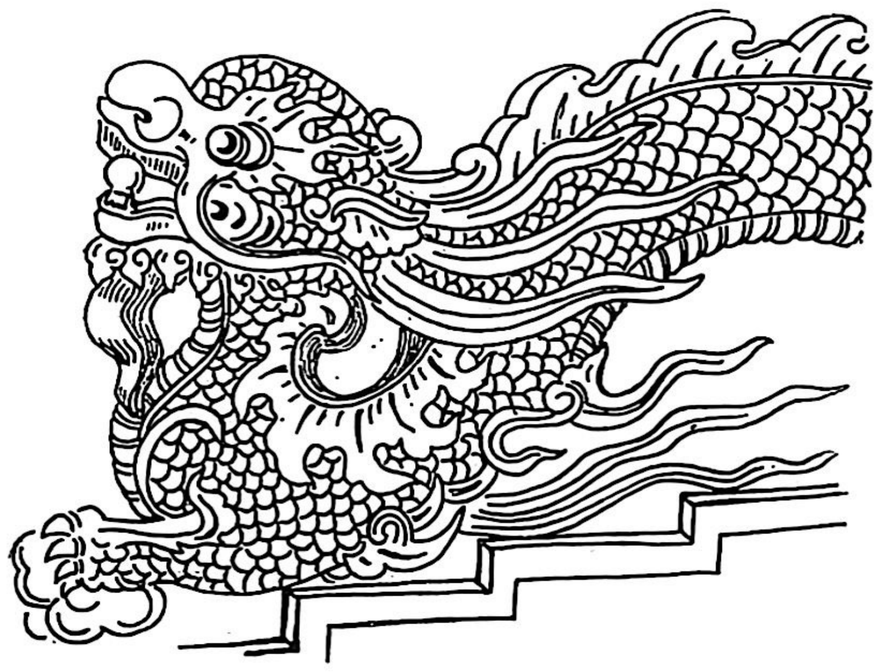
Tu Duc was his own overseer in the construction of his mausoleum-palace which imposed enormous expenses, hard labour and corvées on the troops of the royal guard and the population. In 1866, a revolt was plotted against the king but was discovered and repressed.

The architecture, sculpture, decorative motifs and cult objects found in the temple dedicated to the king's memory, the funeral court and the mausoleum, do not differ from those in the other royal tombs, except that the Stele Pavilion in Tu Duc's tomb is the most monumental and was built in a special style. It is a solid structure, built entirely of masonry, with big columns and brick vaults.

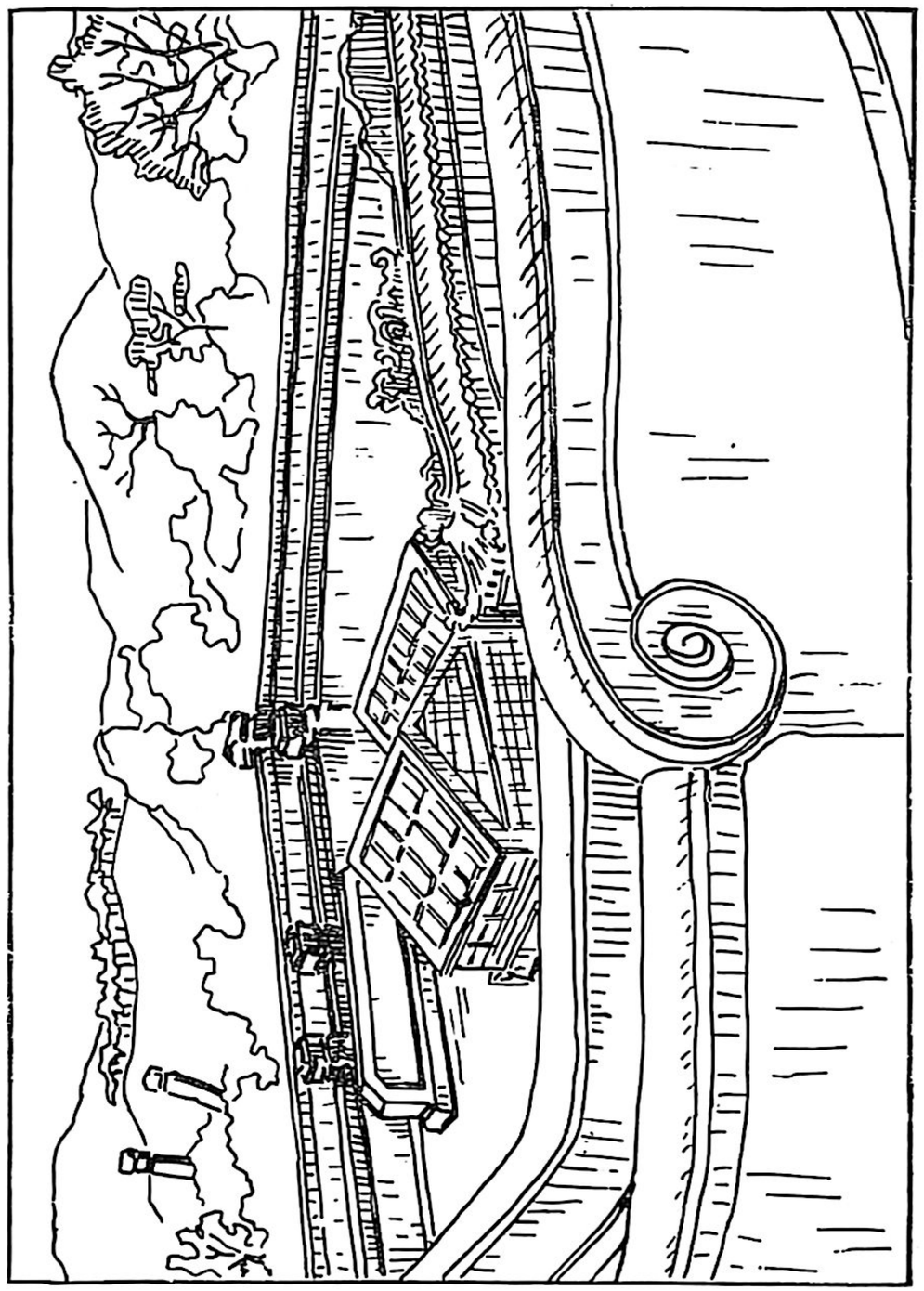
Khiem Lang, as a royal residence, boasts a multitude of buildings: a palace for the king's occasional lodging, another for the harem, a reading pavilion, kiosks for fishing and chess playing, and even a stage for the royal theatrical company which consisted solely of actresses... The whole is in harmony with a system of flower gardens planted with rare and precious varieties of trees, lakes, ponds, islands with foot-bridges and roofed wooden bridges, miniature mountains and alleys lined with pines.

The main value of Tu Duc's tomb lies in its preservation of this specifically oriental art of laying out gardens.

Egret design on an enamelled earthenware jar in the Minh Thanh temple



Dragon adorning the staircase of the Minh Thanh temple



Gia Long's tomb

THE SONG OF THE SAMPAN-WOMAN ON THE PERFUME RIVER

Drifting on the Perfume River,
I stop working my oars for a while.
The sky is clear
And clear is the water.
I stop working my oars for a while,
Drifting on the Perfume River.

The moon rises, shines, and declines...
All my life I've been drifting on the river
Alone
In a battered sampan.

I've never been married,
My boat is empty.
Will it ever find a refuge
Away from this stream of impurity?

Humiliated is my poor body
Will I ever come to the end of my ordeal?

Oh, how could one speak of love?
It's all shame and hypocrisy.

My sampan has grown derelict,
Could it ever be fresh and whole again?

*
* *

Why not, O you, young girl on the river?
Tomorrow, you'll be fresh and fragrant again
Like a jasmine flower.
Tomorrow, you'll be clean and pure again,
Like a forest stream.

Tomorrow a new breeze from the distant horizon
Will carry you to a garden of spring.
Tomorrow, fresh and pure, fragrant and clean
You'll be freed from your sad destiny.
Tomorrow, the long-accumulated filth
Will have vanished like the mist tonight.

Yes, for you, life will be long and hopeful.
Take heart!
The morrow will be bright and sunny
On the Perfume River...

Translated from the Vietnamese by D.T.B.

WHY I HAVE JOINED THE VIÊT NAM ALLIANCE OF NATIONAL, DEMOCRATIC AND PEACE FORCES

To all my fellow-countrymen in South Viet Nam.
Dear fellow-countrymen,

The news that I joined the VNANDPF must, certainly, be causing speculation among both Bu dhists and non-believers as to why an old man like me, a monk for so many years, should still go in for politics, instead of devoting himself entirely to religion.

In my opinion, this is a fair question. Because to enter religion is to renounce power, honours and riches in this world, and to devote one's life to the fulfilment of the ideals of Buddhism.

But over the last thirteen years, from Ngo Dinh Diem to Nguyen Van Thieu and Nguyen Cao Ky, each client administration of the USA has pursued a daily more cruel and more treacherous policy of repression against the Buddhists of South Viet Nam—for the latter, far from giving recognition to these despotic and anti-religious juntas, the betrayers of our country and our people, have fought against them.

Buddhists have waged an unremitting struggle and are ready to sacrifice their lives to defend freedom of belief and the nation's traditional religion. But such struggles and sacrifices are incapable of awakening the conscience or good will of people whose only habit is violence and who only nurse dark designs.

Indeed, the fate of Buddhism and that of the nation are inseparable. While they have been repressing the Buddhists, these cruel foreign-controlled cliques have openly betrayed the people and sold out South Viet Nam to the USA.

The Honolulu and Manila summit conferences were typical examples: American troops were allowed to make a massive invasion of our national territory, to interfere directly in the internal affairs of the Vietnamese people, to trample on our liberty and our national independence and to wage a savage and endless war during which untold crimes and barbarities have been committed against our people. The ruins sown by the USA in the two zones of our country show that the aggressor's cruelty and savagery is unparalleled in human history.

By committing genocide, the US has seriously violated international law and the conscience of mankind.

In the face of this national catastrophe, even such an old religious man as myself cannot remain shut up in his monastery. A Buddhist canon says: "Suppleness of demeanour should go together with strictness of principle."

I realize that with two bare hands and with a doctrine of mercy and non-violence, one cannot overcome the cupidity and bellicosity of people who have lost all conscience: the aggressors and the traitors to their country.

For the salvation of religion and the nation, in order to end the war, restore peace, reconcile the people, wrest back our national sovereignty, and achieve an independent, free, neutral and prosperous South Viet Nam as a step towards the peaceful reunification of the country, I resolutely adhere to the broad national union embodied in the Viet Nam Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace Forces.

Conscious of the importance of the participation of those citizens who are filled with a burning love for religion and the Fatherland, at this decisive hour as we wage a common struggle with the people, I urgently call on all my fellow-countrymen at home and abroad, particularly the Buddhists and the urban population of South Viet Nam, to close their ranks within the VNANDPF, to strengthen their forces and rise up so as to defeat the American aggressors and their henchmen, to wrest back genuine independence, freedom and peace.

May 20, 1968

Venerable Thich Don Hau

Vice-President of the VNANDPF

SOUTH VIETNAMESE BUDDHISTS IN THE FACE OF TYRANNY

The Venerable Thich Don Hau's speech on the 2,512th anniversary of Buddha's Enlightenment (January 1969).

A former representative of the Unified Buddhist Church for the area of Van Hanh and Thua Thien-Hue, the Venerable Thich Don Hau is now Vice-President of the Central Committee of the Viet Nam Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace Forces.

Salute to Buddha, our Teacher!
Compatriots, children of Buddha!

Today Buddhists are celebrating the 2,512th anniversary of the day when Buddha, at the foot of the Bodhi tree, attained the Great Enlightenment, bringing to human civilization a great and noble religious doctrine to deliver mortals from blindness and suffering on the basis of Intelligence and Love. Since then, though it has been at grips with many demons and evil forces, Buddhism has continued to prosper and to radiate over all the four oceans and five continents.

Leaving aside the dogmas of spiritual powers Buddhism has recourse to *tri hue* (1) for a solution to all questions concerning the Universe and human existence, bases itself on *tu bi* (2) and puts forward the happiness of mortals as its final end, even at the cost of destroying one's body. Oh! what nobleness, what beauty when, at the Loving Father's feet, the child of Buddha undertakes to sacrifice himself for the happiness of all!

Today, on the occasion of the anniversary of this Great Enlightenment, I should like, my dear co-religionists, to talk to you about this concept of *tu bi*, an essential category in Buddha's doctrine.

Many people believe that Buddhism is *tu bi*, a love and compassion without any limits which encompasses even insects and ants — even fierce tigers and venomous snakes — both the evil and the good. This mistake makes them think that since *tu bi* does not make any discrimination, it may throw confusion into men's hearts, and hence make it difficult for them to embrace Buddhism. I have been asked: "Master, you teach *tu bi*, love, self-sacrifice for the sake of other people's happiness. But here is a hooligan, a useless and dissolute man who is in need of money on account of the rise in the price of rice. Suppose he rushes into my house with a knife in his hand and force me to give him rice. If I listen to him, it means letting my wife and children starve; if I refuse it means letting his

(1) *Prajna*, *Panna*: intelligence, knowledge, wisdom.
(2) *Maitri*, *metti*: love, compassion.

wife and children starve. Whatever you do, you will be breaking the *tu bi* commandment. Please help me get out of this dilemma, Master."

If you are to give a judgement on this doctrine of *tu bi*, you must first of all understand the meaning of this term. As a Buddhist canon goes: "Bring joy to all, relieve everyone from suffering." This is *tu bi*. How difficult, but how lofty!

Joy in this world may take on a thousand different forms. There is the serene joy, which most deserves to be desired for oneself and given to others. To indulge in the pleasures of love, and soak oneself in strong drinks, this is the joy of dissolute youth. To take delight in owning money and holding high positions is the joy of people greedy for honours and riches. There is the joy of struggling for the liberation of one's native land, and of devoting oneself to work to develop the national economy. This is the joy of those youths who are strong in soul and inspired by a lofty ideal. There is the joy of labouring for one's country's independence, reunification, peace and prosperity. This is the legitimate joy of the revolutionary who loves his fatherland and his fellow-countrymen. The Buddhist believer must use his intelligence and wisdom to tell legitimate from illegitimate joy if he wants to enlighten and liberate those who are going astray. If that useless hooligan were allowed to rob and carry that rice home, he would be in transports of joy, but it would be the joy of an exploiter, a robber, a criminal joy built on the suffering of other people. The Buddhist has not

the right to procure this sort of joy to others. To contribute to such joy, or even to be an indifferent spectator, would be criminal.

So what is the right way to behave toward a hooligan who comes to plunder you? How should we act in order to comply with the doctrine of *tu bi?* This is my answer: if an ordinary mortal would take a stick and give five blows to the plunderer, to chase him off, the faithful disciple of Buddha, I believe, should inflict ten blows on the evil-doer. Because the simple mortal carries out the bludgeoning only for the sake of his own happiness, whereas the Buddhist will only resort to such a measure once his counsel has been in vain; his intention is to awaken the man's conscience and come to the rescue of others.

Not only should the Buddhist *tu bi* let itself be guided by *tri hue*, it must also be united with courage. Love, Intelligence and Courage, are the three great happinesses for a Buddhist. Love deprived of Intelligence is blind and silly. Intelligence without Love is immoral and perfidious. Love and Intelligence without Courage may lead to weakness and inertia. In the face of greed and brutality, the Buddhist should first try to move and reform through Love and to enlighten the Conscience through Intelligence. When Love and Intelligence fail, Courage must be associated with them to ensure that duty is completely fulfilled.

Under Ngo Dinh Diem, the puppet US-paid administration was cynically bent on perpetuating the country's division. It massacred revolutionary militants, repressed Buddhist patriots and plunged the

South Vietnamese people into a real hell. Over and over again, the Buddhist Church, wishing to use moderation, tried to show the ruling clique which was the Right Way and which was the Wrong Way in the hope of bringing them to reason. Faced with this mildness and moderation, the administration far from ceasing its actions opened a reign of terror and pitilessly massacred our fellow-countrymen, burying them alive, compelling Buddhists to abjure their religion, and penning up members of the opposition in concentration camps camouflaged as "hamlets of prosperity" and "agrovilles". In their madness and cruelty, they even went to the length of having the 10/59 decree-law promulgated and a state of war proclaimed in an attempt to annihilate the Buddhist Church. Buddhist banners were torn down, and believers were forbidden to celebrate the anniversary of Buddha's birth. In the hope of bringing Ngo Dinh Diem and his likes to mend their ways, the Buddhists first tried moderate and non-violent ways such as hunger-strikes, agreeing to be put in jail, even showing themselves ready to burn themselves to death. These forms of action had no effect on these men deprived of conscience. And so the Buddhist Church acting in concert with the urban masses has rebelled so as to overturn this regime which has betrayed the Fatherland and the people, and inaugurate the struggle of the urban masses for freedom, democracy and social justice. By so doing, the Buddhist Church conformed to the concept of *tu bi*, since it was motivated by a charitable intent: to free our fellow-countrymen from suffering, to bring them peace and joy.

But US imperialism has not given up its scheme to cling to the South of our country. By using one gang of henchmen after another, the US has continuously intensified its unjust war against our people, extending hostilities to both zones of our country and perpetrating countless crimes at which human nature revolts. The US aggressors and their flunkeys Thieu, Ky, Huong are demons more ferocious than wild beasts, more dangerous than snakes. The Buddhists' duty is to apply every means possible so as to save our fellow-countrymen from suffering and bring back peace and joy to our country. They should not have the slightest illusion about the Thieu—Ky—Huong clique. Thieu's 23/67 decree-law was promulgated with the intention of smashing the Buddhist Church. It was on Ky's order that Nguyen Ngoc Loan slaughtered our Buddhist compatriots in Da Nang and Hue in 1966. Huong founded the General Association of Unified Buddhist Church of Viet Nam with a view to provoking a schism in the Buddhist clergy. His paid agent Kien ransacked the Buddhist Institute and set it on fire. The whole Buddhist Church was offended by his declaration labelling the Buddhists' struggle as "apish antics". Their crime towards the Buddhist Church is obvious, but their crime towards the nation, their crime of sabotaging the Paris Conference, their scheme to prolong the war in order to maintain their position and build their own fortunes from the blood of our fellow-countrymen is still more ignominious.

We Buddhists are bound more than ever to show our courage, actively participate in the intellectuals'

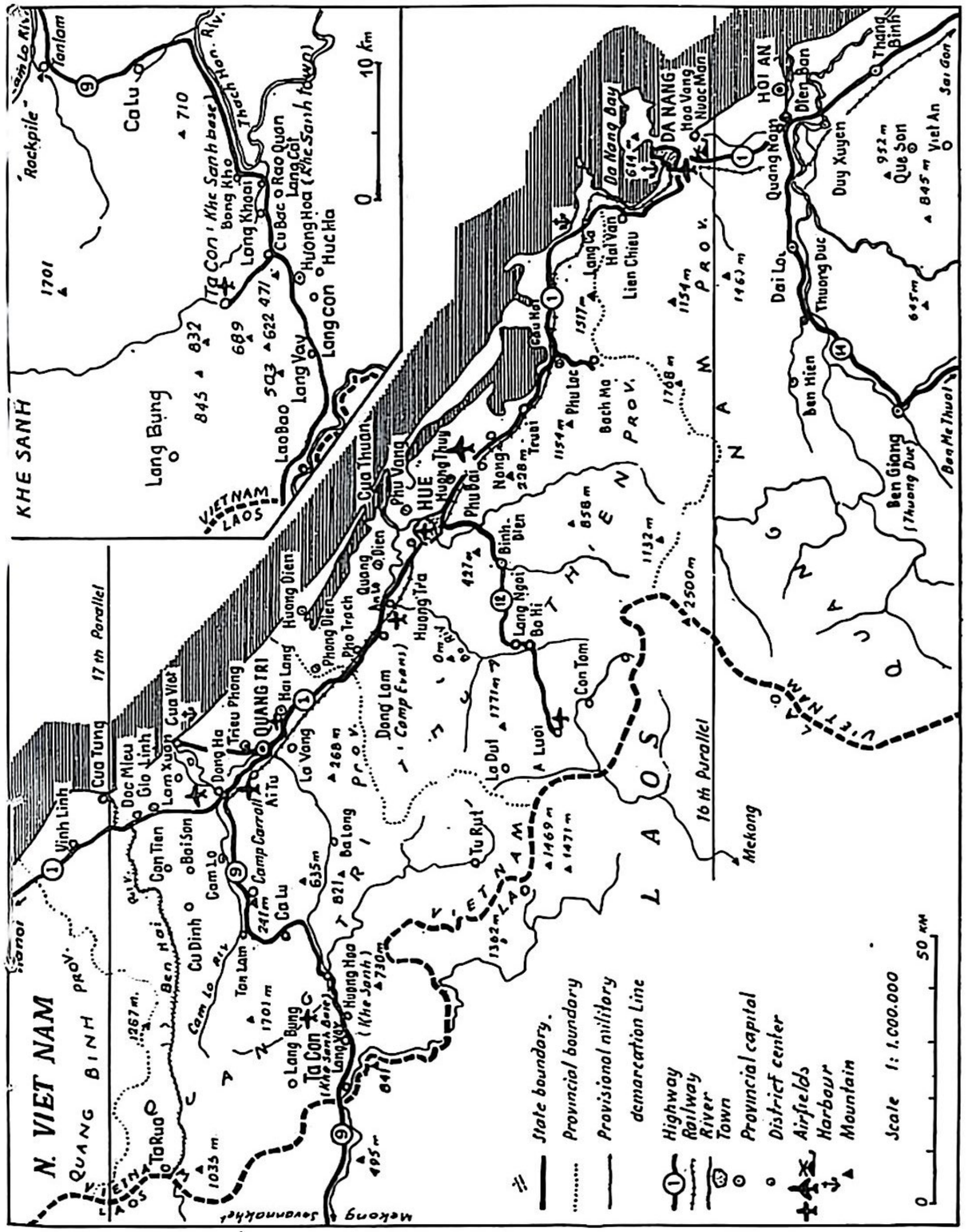
and students' movements, intensify the struggle aimed at overthrowing the Thieu-Ky-Huong clique and installing a government which stands for peace, one which would seriously take part in the Paris Conference, sincerely negotiate with the NFL and the US so as to put an end to the war and bring peace and joy to this country. It is essential that we coordinate our peaceful pilgrimages, seminars and ceremonies in memory of the Buddhists who died for the sake of national independence and peace such as Nhat Chi Mai, with the struggle for the abrogation of the 23/67 decree-law and the restoration of the Buddhist Church's Charter. In this way we will create a vast and vigorous movement, one with the capacity to record more satisfactory results. With the aim of serving the higher interest of the nation and of religion, I have launched an appeal for union and common action by all religions worthy of the name; by so doing, I wanted to express our people's determination to insist that the US put an end to its war of aggression and intervention in the internal affairs of our country. Only an alliance of religions with such a lofty ideal could have a legitimate motivation and a far-reaching effect. At the same time, I want to warn our fellow-believers against the perfidious manœuvres of the US and its flunkeys. Their so-called movements for alliance and union of religions are really intended to muster anti-religious and anti-national elements devoted to the US aggressors.

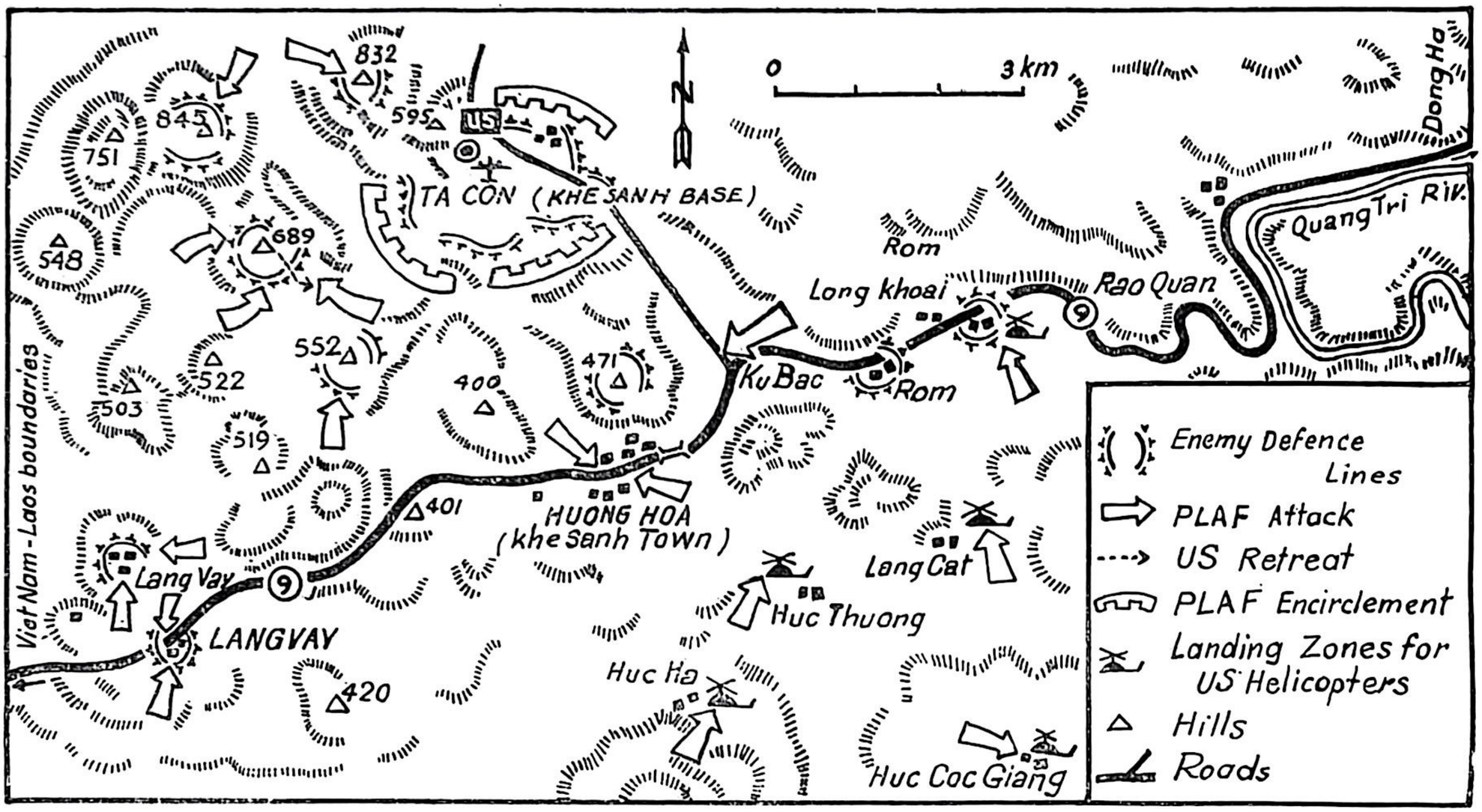
The Buddhist concept of *tu bi* cannot be detached from patriotism, and from deep love for our fellow-countrymen. In the present situation if the country

and his religion are to be saved, the Buddhist should be an integral part of the people and strive to overthrow the Thieu—Ky—Huong clique of blood-thirsty warmongers, to drive out the Yankee aggressors and so put an end to our compatriots' suffering, restore peace and bring joy and happiness to our country.

Only in this way can the Buddhist believer fulfil his vow of *tu bi*.

Salute to Buddha, who vanquished the army of demons!

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HUONG HOA
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Lang Vay
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Huc Thuong
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Lang Cat
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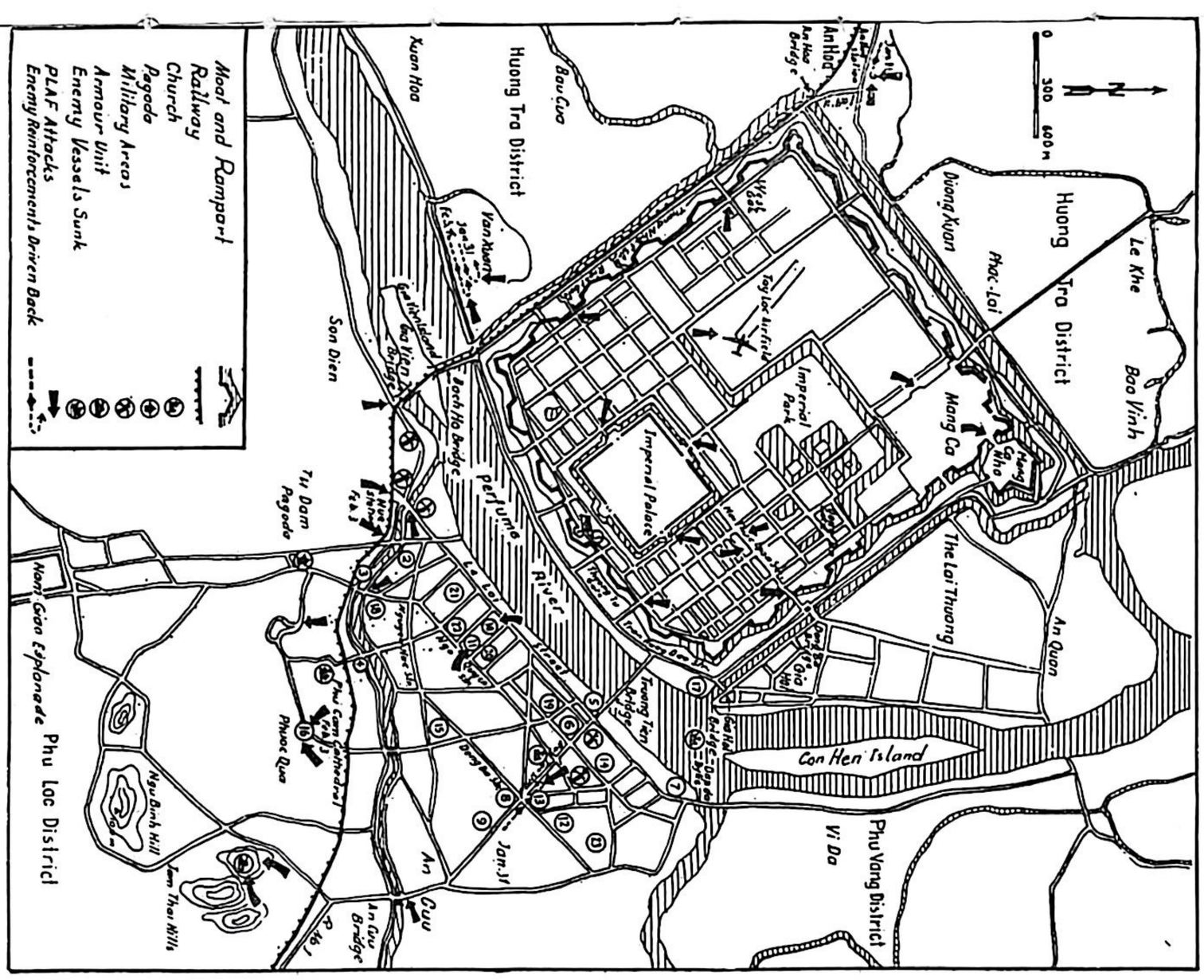
Enemy Defence Lines
PLAF Attack
US Retreat
PLAF Encirclement
Landing Zones for US Helicopters
Hills
Roads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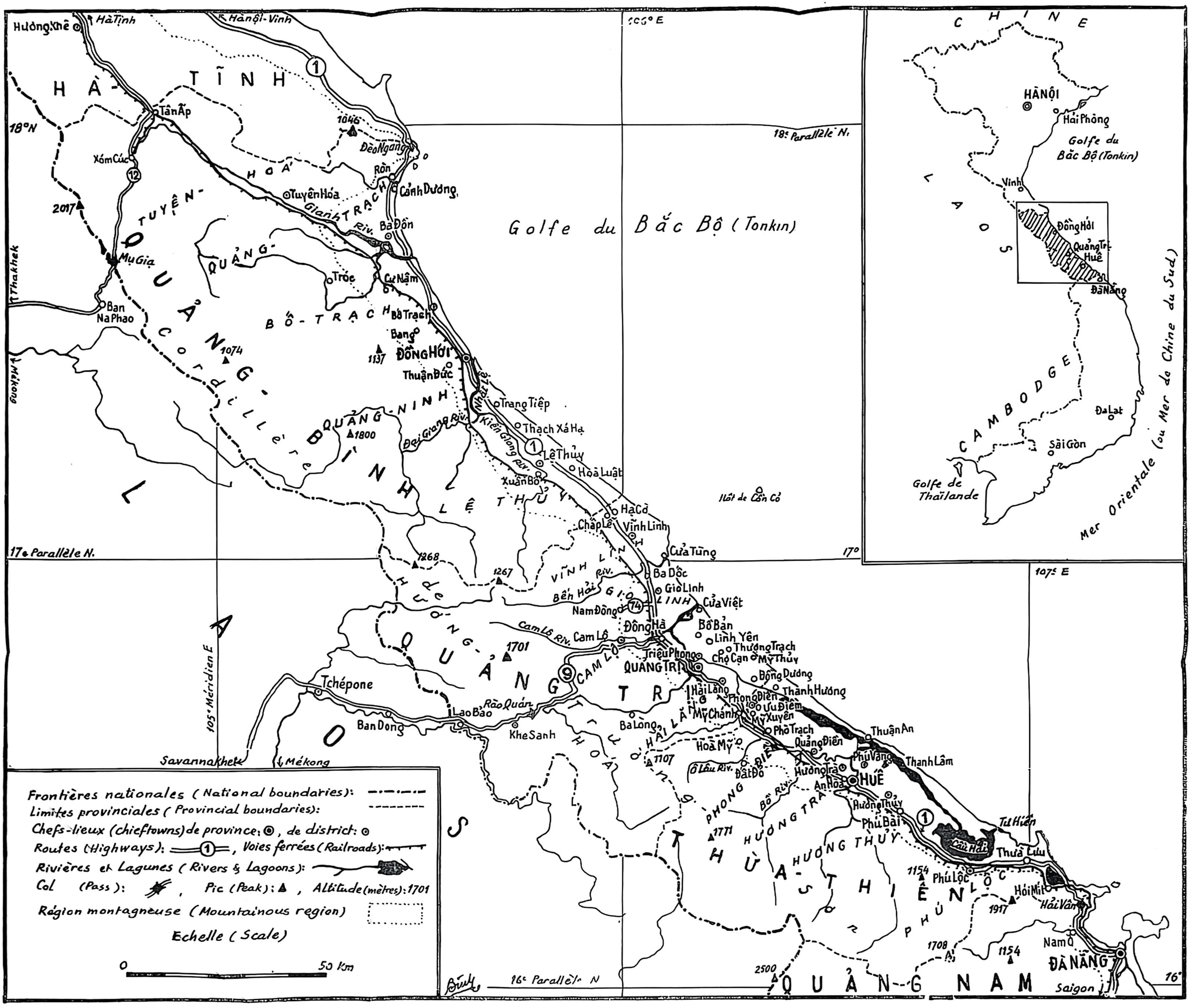
An Hoa
An Hoa Bridge
Bau Cua
Huong Tra District
Xuan Hoa
Son Dien
Tu Dam Pagoda
Perfume River
Bach Ho Bridge
Van Xuan
Imperial Palace
Imperial Park
Truong Tien Bridge
Phu Cam Cathedral
Phuoc Quo
An Cuu Bridge
Ngu Binh Hill
Tam Thai Hills
Nam Giao Esplanade
Phu Loc District
Moat and Rampart
Railway
Church
Pagoda
Military Areas
Armour Unit
Enemy Vessels Sunk
PLAF Attacks
Enemy Reinforcements Driven Back


Hà Tĩnh
Hương Khê
R. Hànội-Vinh
HÀ-TĨNH
Tân Ấp
18°N
Xóm Cúc
2017
Mụ Gia
Thakhek
Ban Na Phao
Mékong
TUYÊN-QUẢNG
QUẢNG-BÌNH
Chaîne Annamitique
1074
1046
Đèo Ngang
Rôn
Cảnh Dương
HOÀ
Tuyên Hóa
Gianh River
Bà Đồn
Golfe du Bắc Bộ (Tonkin)
18e Parallèle N.
Trọc
Cự Nẫm
Bố Trạch
Bang
BỐ-TRẠCH
1137
ĐỒNG HỚI
Thuận Đức
Nhật Lệ
Trang Tiệp
Thạch Xá Hạ
Kiến Giang Riv.
Đại Giang Riv.
QUẢNG-NINH
1800
Lệ Thủy
Hoà Luật
Xuân Bố
LÊ THỦY
Hạ Cỏ
Lất de Cồn Cỏ
Chập Lễ
Vĩnh Linh
Cửa Tùng
17° Parallèle N.
17°
1268
1267
VĨNH LINH
Bến Hải Riv.
Ba Dốc
Gio Linh
GIO LINH
Cửa Việt
Nam Đông
Đông Hà
Bồ Bản
Linh Yên
Thương Trạch
Chợ Cạn
Mỹ Thủy
Cam Lộ Riv.
Cam Lộ
1701
QUẢNG-TRỊ
Triệu Phong
QUẢNG TRỊ
Hải Lăng
Bồng Dương
Thành Hương
Phong Điền
Ưu Điểm
Mỹ Chánh
Mỹ Xuyên
Phò Trạch
Tchépone
Rào Quán
Lao Bảo
Ban Dong
Khe Sanh
Ba Lòng
Hoà Mỹ
Quảng Điền
Thuận An
Phú Vang
Thanh Lâm
1707
Ô Lâu Riv.
Đất Đỏ
Hương Trà
An Hoà
HUẾ
Bồ Riv.
Hương Thủy
Phú Bài
Tứ Hiền
Cầu Hai
Thừa Lưu
1771
HƯƠNG TRÀ
HƯƠNG THỦY
1154
Phú Lộc
Hói Mít
1917
Hải Vân
Nam Ô
ĐÀ NẴNG
Saigon
1708
2500
QUẢNG NAM
16° Parallèle N
16°
105° Méridien E
107° E
Savannakhet
Frontières nationales (National boundaries):
Limites provinciales (Provincial boundaries):
Chefs-lieux (chieftowns) de province: ◉, de district: ⊙
Routes (Highways): ①, Voies ferrées (Railroads):
Rivières et Lagunes (Rivers & Lagoons):
Col (Pass): , Pic (Peak): ▲, Altitude (mètres): 1701
Région montagneuse (Mountainous region)
Echelle (Scale)
0
50 Km
CHINE
HÀNỘI
Hải Phòng
Golfe du Bắc Bộ (Tonkin)
LAOS
Vinh
Đồng Hới
Quảng Trị
Huế
Đà Nẵng
CAMBODGE
Đà Lạt
Sài Gòn
Golfe de Thaïlande
Mer Orientale (ou Mer de Chine du Sud)

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Hue, with its picturesque Perfume River, the antique charm of its royal tombs, the grace of its young girls.

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